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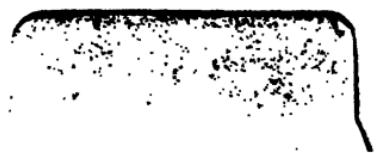
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THE  
ANCIENT RÉGIME  
A TALE.

BY  
G. P. R. JAMES, ESQ.,  
AUTHOR OF  
"THE GIPSY," "THE ROBBER," "THE GENTLEMAN OF THE  
OLD SCHOOL," ETC., ETC., ETC.

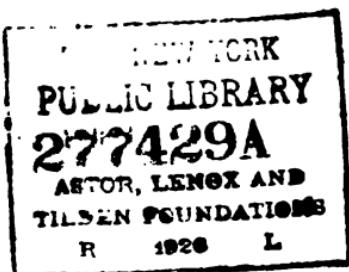
IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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1841.



NOV 1938  
OLIVER  
WAGGON

## P R E F A C E.

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AN apology is due to the public for the employment in the very title of this book of a word taken from a foreign language. Although the term "*régime*" has been commonly used in England in the sense which is here given to it, I certainly should not have retained it had I been able to discover any purely English expression to signify that state of society and government which existed in France immediately before the first revolution. There are doubtless many other faults in these volumes which equally require excuse, and I can only trust that upon all these points the public will extend to me the same lenity which it has hitherto evinced.

In the following tale I have deviated in some degree from the usual plan of my romances, and have undertaken a somewhat difficult task, though that task is one which I had long contemplated before I began the execution, and for which I had arranged the plot and characters with the hope of producing a certain moral effect upon the minds of my fellow-men, at the same time that I afforded them amusement for an idle hour.

A subject of no slight interest was to be found in the education of a girl from infancy to womanhood by a man unconnected with her by blood, together with the results to both; but, at the same time, to treat it properly was not an easy undertaking. In attempting it, I have striven to depict the fine shades of character and

emotion rather than the broader contrasts, the scenic light and shade, and the somewhat melo-dramatic effects, for which there is a great fondness in the present day. But I believe the public can appreciate and like two styles of composition very different from each other; and that, while tales of strongly-excited passion, of crime and sorrow, may occupy its attention at one moment, it will not fail to turn to quieter paintings of the human heart if the pictures are executed with fidelity and vigour. Whether I have in any degree succeeded in doing so in the following pages, the reader must judge; but I trust, at all events, he will find that the story in which the various characters are brought forward may afford sufficient interest to carry him not unwillingly through the work.

In the character of Annette de St. Morin, I have had the peculiar difficulties to contend with which every man must encounter when he endeavours to depict the many fine gradations of thought and feeling produced in a woman's bosom by the different events of her life; and, certainly, the circumstances in which I have placed her have not made the task more easy. Nevertheless, I trust the picture is a true one, and I believe it to be so. The rule which I have gone by in painting this character is, to have all the observations that I have made through life upon the nature and conduct of woman present to my mind, like colours ready on a palette; and I have never asked myself what would be my own sensations in any particular circumstance alluded to, but what would be the feelings of a woman, of such a woman, and of one so educated. Whether I have divined right, or whether I have made a mistake, women alone can judge.

In the character of the abbé, Count de Castelnau, I had scarcely less matter for reflection ; and although I know I might have placed him, as a consequence of his own acts, in much more striking and dramatic situations, I have deliberately refrained from doing so, satisfied that there was a sufficient portion of adventure in the book to make it interesting to the mere lover of story, and seeking to avoid anything the least meretricious and unreal in the portraiture of characters drawn with a higher view.

The rest of the personages I believe to be human beings, without more of evil or more of good than is to be found in a very great number of our fellow-creatures. Many of the traits in the Baron de Cajare are not only natural, but recorded matters of fact ; and those that are so comprise every point that is at all out of the ordinary run of events.

For various reasons, with which I will not trouble the reader at present, I judged it impracticable to remove the period of the story into any other reign than that of Louis XV., although the insane debaucheries of his latter years rendered that monarch's court the last which one would willingly depict. I trust, however, that in those passages where the scene is laid in Paris or Versailles, nothing will be found which can offend the most delicate mind ; and I am certain that not a word can be discovered which has a tendency directly or indirectly to encourage vice, or which has for its object anything but the promotion of that high and holy philosophy which came from God, and leads man to him.

That the work may please you, reader, is my sincere wish ; but if it should benefit you also, if there should

be one sentence in it, or one passage, which may elevate your views, or purify your purposes, or withdraw you from an error, or lead you to a virtue, I have done all that I could hope, and have more than my reward.

THE AUTHOR.

*The Shrubbery, Walmes, June, 1841.*

THE  
ANCIENT RÉGIME.

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CHAPTER I.

In a low-roofed room, on the seventh story of a house in one of the back streets of the city of Paris, and in the year 17—, sat a man habited as an artisan, and bearing in his whole appearance the signs and tokens of a person in the lowest ranks of life. His dress was soiled and dirty, his face and hands not very clean, his sleeves were tucked up nearly to the elbows, and a large leatheren apron, which once had been white, hung from his neck and was girded round his middle. In form he was a powerful man, with broad shoulders, a deep chest, and a sinewy arm ; and his countenance was fine, though not exactly handsome, with a frank and free, yet thoughtful, expression, a fine open brow, with a look of shrewd good sense and some careless humour. In height he stood wellnigh six feet, and in age might have seen about seven or eight-and-twenty years.

In the centre of the room, which was large, though, as we have said, low in the roof, was a table covered with various implements used by the man in pursuit of his trade. There were two lamps, one of which was of a very peculiar form, standing together in the centre of a sort of tray ; and beside them lay a multitude of pincers, of all sorts and sizes, several small files, numerous little coils of gold and silver wire, one or two small crucibles and ladles, a watch-glass half full of fine oil, and a blowpipe. All these signs and circumstances, to the eye of the initiated, would have revealed at once that the man was a filigree-worker ; a trade then much followed in the French capital, though it was the jewellers and great goldsmiths who swallowed up the principal part of its profits, leaving little but a bare subsistence and all the labour to those who produced the various

beautiful little ornaments which decorated the toilet-table of every fine lady in those days.

The man, at the moment the reader entered his room, was occupied in the pursuit of his calling. From a soiled sheet of paper before him, covered all over with tracings of the most beautiful arabesques that it was possible to conceive, he was imitating, with the greatest nicety and delicacy, in silver, a small basket, representing the cup of a lotus. Now he plied with the utmost rapidity a small pair of pincers; now he used the file to remove any little irregularity; now, by the use of the blowpipe, he fixed the numerous threads and filaments together, at places where the juncture could scarcely be perceived. Then, when he had done a certain portion, he paused, looked at it, and seemed to admire his own work.

At length, as the filigree-worker was thus proceeding, a slight noise from the other side of the room—a mere rustle, as it were—caught the quick ear of the Parisian artisan, and, starting up from his stool, he laid down the pincers and the little basket, and, moving with a quiet step across the room, peeped into a cradle which stood within a few feet of the fireplace.

Therein lay as beautiful an infant as ever was seen: a little girl, fine, healthy, rosy, seeming to set at defiance all those sad ills of poverty by which she was evidently surrounded. She had woken up from sleep, and when she saw the well-known face above her, she smiled gladly and moved her little arms. The artisan gazed upon her for a moment thoughtfully, then shook his head with somewhat of a sigh, saying, "I must not take thee up, for I have nothing to give thee. Sleep, sleep, my baby, for I must work for food;" and, rocking the cradle gently with his hand, he endeavoured to lull the child into slumber again by singing to her one of the many little lullabies which were then, and still are, common in France. He had just succeeded, and was still going on for a little, to make the conquest of the drowsy god secure, when the door opened, and a good-looking woman about his own age entered, and approached him quietly. There was some degree of sorrow and some degree of timidity in her look; and, indeed, her face was like that of one who brings tidings that will certainly grieve, and may perhaps offend; and yet the good artisan did not seem of a disposition likely to be offended

easily, or to be approached with fear—at least by a woman.

“ Well, Margiette,” he said, in a low voice, “ would he give you the money ? ”

“ Not a sou,” replied the woman, in a sad tone : “ he said that he had never in his life paid a farthing for any work before it was done, and never would.”

The man bit his lip, and his brow grew dark for a moment. “ Well, well,” he said, with a smile, and a sigh the next moment, “ the man’s not wrong, after all.”

“ He said something, too,” said the woman, “ about your not having finished the last vinaigrette which he bought of you at the time you promised it.”

“ How could I ! ” exclaimed the man, sharply. “ Did I not burn my hand ? and could I do fine work with my hand all swelled ? ”

“ But he saw you at the fair at Charenton,” said the woman.

“ To be sure,” answered her husband, with a laugh. “ I don’t walk with my hands, so I could go to Charenton though I could not work. But you watch the child, Margiette ! I must sit up and work all night, and all day to-morrow. I can get the basket finished before seven to-morrow. It is only for the child I care : what can be done for it ? Hark ye, Margiette : take that lamp I am not using to the *revendeuse*, and see what she will give you for it ; the poor babe must have something to eat, and you, too, my Margiette : I can do very well without.”

The woman had still continued to gaze in his face with a timid look, as if she had something to say which she was half afraid of uttering, but she now answered, “ I have got something for the child, Pierre, here in my basket.”

“ How, how ! ” demanded the man, somewhat sharply. “ How did you get it ? ”

“ Nay, do not be angry ; I would not have taken it, Pierre, but for the child. There were three gentlemen in Monsieur Fiteau’s shop changing some gold and buying some lace ; and one of them, an abbé, seeing me wailing inclined to weep when Fiteau refused me the money, began to ask me questions ; and I told him that I should not care about the matter, for that my husband could soon get the work done, but that there was a child, and a child’s hunger would not wait. Upon which he offered me some money. I would only take half a livre,

for I thought you would be angry ; but, as I came along, I bought this little loaf and some milk for the child ; and now," she added, " here are five sous more : if you will let me, I will go and buy something for your supper."

" No," said her husband, " no : you did very right, good wife, to take the money for the child, but I cannot eat the bread of charity while I can work. Make something for the little one and for yourself : I can do very well without till to-morrow."

The woman declared that she would not taste anything if he did not ; and, as usual, by persevering she gained her point. They divided the bread into three portions, reserved one, together with the milk, against the child's waking, and each took another. The woman ate hers with calm and quiet resignation ; but the man swallowed two or three mouthfuls with difficulty, and then, putting down the crust upon the table, burst into tears, exclaiming, " This is the first time I have eaten the bread of charity ! Oh, may it be the last !"

Almost as he spoke there was a knock at the chamber door, a hand laid upon the latch thereof, and a stranger entered the room. He was dressed in the habit of an abbé, which was in some degree clerical, and distinguished from the rest of the world those personages who had taken what are called the first vows, which in fact bound them to nothing. Those vows were continually renounced at pleasure ; and even while they remained in force they did not restrain the person who had taken them from mingling with the full current of worldly things, enjoying all the pleasures, and but too often sharing in all the vices, of society. Abbés were prevented, indeed, from marrying till they had formally cast off those vows ; but this restriction was of course only an occasion for additional licentiousness, so that it became a common saying in regard to any one who had a numerous family, " He has as many children as an abbé."

The person who entered might be five or six-and-thirty, and was a fine, powerful man, though the countenance was somewhat pale and sallow, and the eyes were near together, though fine ; while a curl about the lip denoted that there was some bitterness of spirit within, either from disappointment or a turn of mind naturally sarcastic.

There is, perhaps, as much of what we may call ex-

pression in a man's carriage, and particularly in his step, as there is in his countenance ; and the step of the abbé was very peculiar. It was slow and noiseless, but firm and fixed. Though his shoulders were not round, his head bent a little forward, and his full dark eyes, when resting on any object, remained half open, without the slightest wandering or movement. Though keen in themselves, no motion betrayed the secrets of the heart : they seemed full of inquiry, but answered nothing.

I mean not by any means to say that his countenance was without expression, for it had much peculiar character of its own ; though the expression varied only according to his will, and not according to his emotions. On the present occasion, his lip bore a benign and chastened smile ; and though he entered with his broad-brimmed hat on, he removed it immediately as he advanced towards the table. The filigree-worker and his wife rose ; and the woman dropped a low courtesy, while her husband fixed his eyes with an inquiring and even somewhat stern glance upon the stranger, and then suddenly turned and looked for a moment towards the dying embers of their small fire, till he had wiped away all traces of the late emotion from his face.

"I have been inquiring into your situation, my good lady, since I saw you," said the abbé, "and, from the account which even that hard-hearted old usurer Fiteau gives of you and your husband, I have become interested in you, and wish to know if I can serve you."

The woman hesitated, and Pierre himself turned round and remained silent for a single minute, gazing on the stranger with a curious and somewhat doubtful smile. At length he answered, "We have much to thank you for already, sir, and it is an easy thing to serve people so poor as we are."

"Not always," answered the abbé, without a change of countenance : "each person in this world has his particular views, and I already know that you have yours."

"How so, sir?" said the man, again gazing on him eagerly : "have I ever seen you before?"

"Not that I know of, my good friend," replied the abbé, with a smile ; "but your question is easily answered. There are about ten men in Paris under the king, who, if I had offered them half a dozen livres, would have refused to take them. Now, some twenty

minutes ago, I offered your wife here, when I saw she was in distress, a handful of the change I had just received. She contented herself with half a livre, and when I urged her to take more, said that her husband would be angry if she did. Now have I not reason to say that you have your own peculiar views! But, to put all such things aside, tell me if I can serve you, and how."

"Only, sir, I believe, by ordering some of these trinkets from me," replied the man, in a tone considerably softened; and he pointed to the basket he was working.

The abbé took it up and examined it. "It is very beautiful," he said: "come, I will buy this of you, and pay for it now, though I, alas!" he added, "have neither wife nor children to please with such gauds. What is the price of it?"

"Nay, sir, I cannot sell you that," replied the man: "it is promised to Monsieur Fiteau; but I can soon work you another exactly like it."

"You can work him another," replied the abbé, somewhat sharply. "Why should I wait, who am willing to befriend you, and he not, who will do nothing for you!"

"Because I have promised it to him, sir," replied the man, simply, "and I cannot break my word."

"You are right," answered the abbé: "I applaud your honesty, and you shall work me another. What may the price be, my good friend?"

"Nay, sir, I hardly know," replied the filigree-worker. "Monsieur Fiteau pays me five livres for my labour, and finds the silver; but what he charges I cannot tell."

The stranger took up the basket and examined it with a thoughtful air, murmuring as if to himself, "The usurer! What may the silver be worth?"

"Some six or seven livres when spun into wire," replied the man.

"And he gives you five," rejoined the abbé, "taking forty for himself. Out upon it! Here, my friend, here are ten livres to begin with: when you bring me the basket done, I will give you twenty more, and then I shall have the trinket at about one half of the price which this man Fiteau would charge me for it."

The filigree-worker suffered the abbé to put the money down upon the table without taking it up. He look-

ed at it somewhat wistfully, indeed, and then said, "I should not wish for anything beforehand but for the sake of the child. We have a hard matter to support ourselves, sir, and, to say the truth, the poor babe is sometimes sadly pinched. I feared this night that I should be obliged to sell some of my tools, or let the poor babe want till to-morrow night."

"Ay, so your wife told me," replied the abbé, "and it was about that I came hither. Do you love the child very much?"

The man gazed at him with an inquiring look for a moment ere he replied; but he said at length, "We do love the child much, sir! Can you doubt it?"

"Well, then," rejoined the abbé, "what I have to propose will give you pleasure. I want some object to fix my affections upon in this world. I have many rich benefices, and but few objects of thought or care. You shall give me your child to educate. I will adopt it as my own, and lead it forward unto wealth and high station. What say you: will you consent?"

The proposal was in every respect an extraordinary one; for it must be recollectcd that the distinctions of classes in France was at that time preserved with the greatest strictness; and though there might have been nothing wonderful at all in a wealthy abbé adopting the child of any poor noble, yet the idea of his selecting an object for adoption from either the class of *roturiers* or artisans could never have presented itself until that moment to the mind of the filigree-worker and his wife. Yet, strange to say, it did not seem to surprise either of them very much.

"Will you give us some time to consider of it?" said the man, bluntly.

"How long would you have?" demanded the abbé.

The filigree-worker thought for a moment, and then required four days, to which the stranger consented; and, after speaking with them for some time longer upon their circumstances and situation, the abbé gave them his address and left them.

The filigree-worker continued to labour at the basket during the whole night; but, though he had made considerable progress before the next morning, the trinket was not yet completed when the daylight began to peep in at the high window. As soon as day did appear, however, Pierre rose from his labour, washed his

face and hands clean, cast away his working apron and jacket, and put on his holyday coat. He then took five out of the ten livres which the abbé had given him ; woke his wife, who had gone to bed, with a kiss ; and, telling her that he was about to set out, but would be back certainly at the end of the three days, he descended the long narrow staircase of the house, and issued forth into the street.

The artisan plodded onward with a quick step and a resolute face through the gates of Paris and the suburbs, past St. Denis, Ecouen, and Luzarches, till he reached Chantilly, towards the hour of four in the afternoon. It was a long walk : the road was dusty, and the filigree-worker paused for an hour to get some food and to rest himself ; but at the end of that time he recommenced his journey, proceeding by Creil till he came to the pleasant village of Cauffry under Liancourt, where he stopped for the night. Early in the following morning he went on again, through the rich and beautiful country which surrounds Clermont, amid hills and valleys, and brooks and fields, till he reached that pretty town, which he seemed to know well, for he stopped to speak to two or three acquaintances. From more than one he seemed to hear news that grieved him, for his countenance grew sad ; and he quickened his pace as he quitted the town, hastening onward by Fitzjames and Argenlieu, where he turned from the high road, and, following the course of the Arre, bent his steps towards the small village and chateau of Argencerre. When he was within about half a mile, however, of the village church, he thought he heard some mournful sounds coming up from the valley, and, hurrying on towards the side of the hill, he saw winding away from the chateau towards the church the long line of a funeral. Pierre gazed forward for a moment or two with his hands clasped together ; then, sitting down upon the bank, he covered his eyes and wept. Whatever was the cause of his emotion, the object of his journey seemed to be accomplished ; for, without proceeding any farther, he turned back upon his path, and made the best of his way to Paris.

## CHAPTER II.

It was the morning of the fourth day after that which closed with the visit of the abbé to the high chamber of the filigree-worker ; and Pierre Morin, with his good wife Margiette, stood together in the middle of the same chamber, the wife holding in her arms the beautiful child we have mentioned, while the husband was performing what appeared to be a very barbarous operation. With one of the small sharp-pointed knives which he employed in his art, the man was tracing two or three small fine lines on the baby's arm, very high up, so as generally to be covered by the clothes in which she was dressed. The child did not cry or give any sign of pain, but smiled in the man's face, although the next moment the lines which he had drawn, and which were at first colourless, took the form of a Maltese cross, and became distinctly marked by a small portion of blood oozing through each. As soon as the artisan saw this appearance, he took up a box filled with a black powder, and rubbed it upon the spot. The application seemed to make the wound smart, for the little girl now began to cry ; but was soon pacified again, the man kissing her affectionately, and saying, "It is for thine own good, *petiotte*. Come, wife," he continued, "cover that over, and let us take her away. Bless thy sweet eyes, child ! it may be long ere I see them again."

The wife took the child in her arms, the man put on his hat, and away they went together, threading the long and crowded streets till they came into a more airy and pleasant neighbourhood, where, passing along one of the broad quays, they crossed the river by a bridge, and approached the palace of the Luxembourg. In one of the best streets of that quarter, they stopped before a fine tall house, the door of which, however, was open, exposing to view the stone staircase within, which was then, as is but too common in the French capital even now, covered with filth of the most disgusting description. Standing in the doorway was a man who might be a tradesman, or who might be the intendant of

some gentleman ; and Pierre Morin, with a low bow and humble tone, asked if the Abbé de Castelneau lived there.

The man drew a little on one side, as if to let them pass, replying, "*Au second*," which may be translated, "Up two pair."

He said no more, and with the same taciturnity Pierre Morin and Margiette began to climb the long and dirty staircase which led to the apartments of the Abbé de Castelneau. It at once became evident to the filigree-worker and his wife that the abbé was in what was and is called "*chambres garnies*," or furnished apartments. Now such was a state of life which, in that day, except under particular circumstances, implied a much less degree of respectability than that which was termed being *dans ses meubles*, or in a house of one's own ; for it generally happened, with all people of station in the city, that they either had their own hotel, their own apartments and furniture, or apartments lent to them by some of their wealthier relations, who resided in those large mansions which all the principal nobility then maintained in Paris. Another thing, also, was remarkable, which was, that a person of the appearance and seeming wealth of the Abbé de Castelneau should choose that quarter of the city ; for, although the houses in the neighbourhood of the Luxembourg were far better than in the vicinity of the Palais Royal, yet fashion said that the latter were to be preferred ; and, therefore, two rooms and an antechamber in the Rue St. Honoré cost double the sum of a mansion near the Luxembourg.

Nevertheless, Pierre Morin and his wife, although the good artisan was aware of all these particulars, marched steadily up the stairs, and, stopping at a door on the second floor, knocked boldly for admission. A lackey in a gray livery let them in, and with scarcely a word of inquiry conducted them to the presence of his master, who was seated, as was the custom in those days, in his bedchamber. When they entered the room, the abbé raised his calm quiet eyes towards them, without the slightest expression either of pleasure or surprise.

"Well, my friend," he said, "I learn your determination from seeing the child ; but you should have given me notice. I am not quite prepared."

He advanced as he spoke, and caressed the little girl,

who seemed in no degree dismayed by the face of the stranger ; but, on the contrary, laughed with infant glee at the sight of his dazzling white teeth, which were displayed somewhat more than usual as he played with the young being before him ; and at length, when he took her in his arms, though he held her with no very dexterous hand, she showed no sign of fear, but looked happy and contented. The abbé smiled with a brighter expression of countenance than usual, saying at the same time, “Perhaps it may be so !”

What he meant neither Pierre Morin nor his wife understood ; but there was much shrewd common sense in the breast of the artisan ; and, after suffering the abbé to amuse himself with the child for a minute, he said, “We have brought her here, sir, at your request, and though we may grieve to part with her, we will leave her to your care upon one condition.”

“Ha !” said the abbé, “a condition ! What may that be ?”

“Only this, sir,” answered Pierre Morin, “that you shall promise me in writing to breed her up well and honourably, and to give her a marriage-portion according to the state in which you place her.”

The abbé smiled with one of his cold calm looks, and replied, “You are a philosopher, my friend ; but what you ask is right and just, and I will content you. Can you write ?”

“Oh yes, sir,” replied the man : “I, who live in the garret, can write better than some that live lower.”

“Well, then,” answered the abbé, “go to that table, and put down exactly what you wish me to promise, while I talk to your wife about what is needful for the child herself.”

The artisan did as he was bid ; and the abbé made many an inquiry of good Margiette, which showed that he had thought much on all the points connected with the new task he was about to undertake. The clothing, the food, the habits of the child were all investigated ; and after speaking for some time to the artisan’s wife, he called to his servant, and bade him seek a person whom he called Donnine.

By the time he had given this order, the filigree-worker had completed his task, and the abbé read the paper he had drawn up with a smile. “That will scarcely do,” he said, “but I will put it in other language ;” and

he then wrote down, "I, Ferdinand de Castelneau, acknowledge having received from the hands of Pierre Morin his daughter —, for the purpose of educating her as I would my own child; and I promise him hereby to give her as honourable and good an education, and as ample a dowry when she marries, as if she were in reality and truth my own daughter. What is her name?" demanded the abbé, when he had concluded writing.

"Annette, sir," replied the artisan, "Annette; her name is Annette."

The abbé then filled up the blank which had been left in the paper, and handed it to Pierre Morin, asking if it met his views. The artisan read it carefully, and expressed himself satisfied; but added, "You will let us see her sometimes, sir?"

"I will never refuse you when you apply," replied the abbé; "but, of course, your applications will not be too often. Your regard for her will best show itself both in suffering me to think of her as if she were my own child, and in allowing her to think of me as if I were her father."

As he spoke, the servant in gray entered the room again, bringing with him an extremely neat and respectable-looking woman, apparently somewhat past her fiftieth year. The abbé held up his finger to Pierre Morin, and made a similar sign to his wife, saying, "Not a word! This is the child I spoke of, Donnine. Take her from this good woman: you are hereafter her *bonne*. Show her all kindness, and try to make her happy."

"Oh, that I will, right soon," replied the good woman, who was a gay little withered Picard. "I will make her happy enough. Come to me, my darling!"

Thus saying, she took the little girl from the arms of poor Margiette, who kissed the child again and again, and could not refrain from a natural tear or two. The abbé then signed the paper he had written and gave it to the artisan, whom he beckoned into the antechamber with his wife, and then offered them some money. The man put it away, however, with the back of his hand, saying, in a tone of indignation, "I do not sell the child, sir!" He then walked towards the door, paused for a moment, called to his wife to come—for she had lingered to say a word or two more—and then left the abbé with his new charge.

## CHAPTER III.

THE scene which we have just contemplated took place on Monday, the 20th of March, in the year we have mentioned. As soon as the filigree-worker and his wife had left the apartment, the Abbé de Castelneau returned to the room in which he had left the child with the good woman Donnine. They both gazed into the face of the child for a moment or two in silence, and then the abbé inquired, "What think you, Donnine?"

"I do not know what to think, my son," replied the good nurse; "but I am sure whatever you do is right." However, lest there should arise any doubt in the reader's mind as to who Donnine was, from the fact of her calling the abbé "my son," we shall proceed to explain a little more of her history.

In her very early youth Donnine had been *soubrette* of the Abbé de Castelneau's mother, and was really a good and excellent girl. The lady, not long after her marriage into the family of Castelneau, had promoted a union between her pretty attendant Donnine and the old *sommelier*, or butler, of her husband's elder brother, the Count de Castelneau. The butler unadvisedly left the family of his master, in the hope of making a fortune in the good city of Paris. Those were the days of the regency and of mad speculations. The poor butler, with his little wealth, got entangled with the financiers and gamblers of the capital, ruined himself and his family, and, to avoid misery in one world, flew to meet the judgment of another. Poor Donnine, left penniless, and with a prospect of soon having another to support as well as herself, sought out her former mistress in the South, and was treated by Madame de Castelneau with very great kindness, that lady being then, like herself, on the very eve of childbirth. The infant to which Donnine gave birth expired within a few hours after its eyes had first opened upon the light of this world, while the son which was born to her mistress proved strong and healthy; and Donnine once more entered the family in which she had been first received as a servant, returning to it in the humbler, though more important, post

of a wet-nurse. Thus the Abbé de Castelneau was, in fact, her foster-son; and, whatever might be his faults or errors—and they were, alas! very many—to her he had always shown undeviating kindness, and in good fortune or evil fortune—for very many vicissitudes had befallen him—he had always retained Donnina in his household, and had always attended to her wants and wishes.

She, too, on her part, combined, in her regard for her foster-son, all the affection of a mother, and the admiration of an attached dependant. She was by no means without good sense, quickness, and activity of thought. On all ordinary occasions she could judge of right and wrong as acutely as any one; but the moment the Abbé de Castelneau was interested, a sort of film seemed to fall over her eyes, which prevented her viewing objects in their natural light, and everything that he did seemed to be excellent, admirable, and just.

The child soon began to find that she was in the hands of strangers, and that those she loved had left her. A few tears were shed, but she was speedily soothed; and being of a gay, sweet disposition, with full health, and with no corporeal irritation, the drops were ere long dried again, and, laid upon the floor, she amused herself for nearly an hour by clutching at a cross and rosary which the abbé placed just beyond her reach. It was a curious sight to see the beautiful child thus engaged, and displaying a thousand infant graces in her efforts to reach the object before her, and the calm, thoughtful man, with his full grave eyes, watching her with a look of interest such as he seldom displayed, and every now and then bursting into unwonted laughter, as he drew the rosary a little farther away, just at the moment she was about to seize it.

During all this time the child and the abbé were left alone together; for, after a brief consultation between him and Donnina, the nurse had gone forth to seek other and better clothing for the child, that which had been brought by the filigree-worker's wife being somewhat scanty in quantity and very anomalous indeed in quality. Some of the articles of her dress were as coarse as it was possible to see; but it is to be remarked that these were chiefly the outward garments, for the inner ones were fine and costly.

We must follow the good woman, however, to the place where such objects as she then wanted were to be

### THE ANCIENT RÉGIME.

found more readily than anywhere else in the French capital. Strange as it may seem, this was at the place of public execution in the city of Paris, called the Place de Grève ; but it must be remarked that no legal slaughter was permitted to take place there on Monday : and on that day was held, every week, a general sort of fair, called the Foire du Saint Esprit, where every article of cloathing—in general second-hand, but sometimes also new—was to be found spread out for purchase, in the very spot where the bloody arm of the law at other times exercised its power. I cannot better describe this curious scene than in the words of an author who lived in those very days, and who, speaking of this place, says, “ There the wives of the lesser shopkeepers, and other very economical women, go to buy their caps, gowns, cassocks, and even shoes, ready made. There, too, the informers look out for the pickpockets and the inferior sorts of thieves, who come thither to sell the handkerchiefs, napkins, and other things they have stolen. These men are there apprehended, as well as those who come to that place itself with similar views of plunder ; for it would seem that even that spot (the Place de Grève) is not capable of inspiring them with any very prudent reflections. One would imagine that this fair was the feminine stripping of a whole province, or the pillage of a nation of Amazons. Petticoats, bustles, dressing-gowns, are scattered about in piles, from which one may choose at leisure ; and here the robe of a president’s wife is bought by a procuress, and a *grisette* puts on the cap of a marchioness’s waiting-woman. Here they absolutely dress themselves in public, and we shall soon see them changing their under garments in this place. The buyer neither knows nor cares whence come the stays for which she bargains ; and the most innocent poor girl, even under her mother’s eye, puts on those in which, on the preceding evening, danced the licentious woman of the opera. Everything seems purified by the sale, or by the inventory taken after death ! As it is, women who buy here and women who sell, the sharpness is pretty equal on both sides, and one hears afar the contention of eager and discordant voices. Viewed near, the scene is more curious still ; for when women contemplate female decorations, there is something very peculiar to be seen in the physiognomy. In the evening all this mass of

goods and chattels is carried away as if by enchantment, and there remains not a rag. But this inexhaustible magazine will reappear on Monday next without fail."

In the great republic of the *Foire du Saint Esprit* there were various grades and classes, some stalls much superior and more aristocratic than others, some who directed and some who followed their guidance, as was the case of the republic of ancient Rome, and with every other republic that ever was or ever will be ; for, alack and a well a day, what is the senator but the peer? what consuls, dictators, presidents, but kings, only that, as poor Ophelia has it, they "wear their rue with a difference!" All things must have their grades ; all lands must see some rule and others obey ; all people divide themselves into those who follow and those who lead. It is but, in general, a difference of the duration of command ; and whether it be that each individual holds his station by the month or the year, or the seventy years, or only for a day, as was the case in the *Foire du Saint Esprit*, matters but little, surely, when life itself is but an hour. It is wonderful what vast changes we make in names, while realities continue the same.

To return, however, from such digression, there were, as I have said, various classes among the booths, and an aristocracy even in the sellers of old clothes. It was to one of the most dignified, then, of the saleswomen, who, with a cap as white as snow, a gown of taffetas unsoiled and not ruffled, and beautiful dimity pockets pendant on either side, that the good nurse Donnine addressed herself for the purchase of all the little articles of clothing which were required for the child Annette. There was much chaffering and bargaining ; and the woman failed not to declare to her customer that not one of the articles which she sold her had ever been worn by any one. This thing had been made for the wife of a counsellor, whose child had been stillborn ; that had been expressly ordered by the capricious Marquise of —, who, when she saw it, changed her mind, and would not have it ; the other had been destined for the child of the great banker, but had been found somewhat too small.

"And that beautiful gown of brocade," said Donnine, pointing to one which the saleswoman kept near her, as if she were afraid of its touching anything else, "what is the price of that?"

"Ah! my good woman," replied the other, shaking her head, "that's for no one but the mistress of a financier, or for one of our great actresses to perform the part of Esther or Judith in, I can warrant you. Why, I paid three louis and a half for that gown this morning. The *femme-de-chambre* told me that it was made for Mademoiselle D'Argencerre when she was going to be married to the young Count of Castelneau, the old count's son, you know, and it has never been worn."

"Why, how did that fall out?" demanded Donnинe.

"Why, the two fathers quarrelled," said the other, "upon some old grudge; and the young count was sent away to join the army on the Rhine, and was killed but ten days after he arrived."

"Well, for all that," said Donnинe, "I would not have sold my wedding gown if I had been the lady."

"Ay, but she took on and died," replied the saleswoman, "and the clothes then, of course, fell to her maid."

To this last speech Donnинe made no reply; but, gathering up what she had bought into a small bundle, she paid for the whole, and walked away, but did not proceed immediately to the house from which she had come. On the contrary, indeed, she turned her steps in a direction the most opposite, and, passing the Palais Royal, took her way through a street which has since changed its name more than once. It was then called the Rue de Boutteville; and about half way up was a large house, with a man dressed in somewhat of a military costume, but in clothes which denoted deep mourning, standing under the arch of the *porte cochère*. Over his shoulder he wore an immense broad belt, which was fringed with black, and in it hung a peculiar sort of sword, only worn by that class of people who acted the part of porters at the doors of gentlemen's houses in Paris, and were known by the name of Swiss, let them come from what country they would. In his hand the person we have mentioned—who was a portly man, with large limbs and rounded stomach—bore a tall ebony staff of great thickness, and with a gilded globe at the top, which now, however, was covered with black crape. As he saw Donnинe approach, his face relaxed from its solemnity into a half smile, and he pulled off his cocked hat with great politeness.

"Ah! monsieur," said Donnинe, pausing for a moment

near the door, "I have heard the sad news! So made-moiselle is dead, poor thing!"

"Alas! yes, madam," replied the Swiss, in a tone of lamentation. "She was a sweet young lady. We buried her yesterday morning, poor thing! and a fine sight it was to see. We came away directly after the funeral, for my lord and my other young lady could not bear the chateau afterward. But here come some of the servants, and I must not be seen speaking to any of your family, you know, however I may personally regret that such disunion should prevail."

With this solemn and courteous sentence, the porter drew himself somewhat back; and Donnine, making him a courtesy, which he returned by a profound bow, proceeded on her way, and took the first turning that led towards the Luxembourg.

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#### CHAPTER IV.

We must now return for a short space of time to our filigree-worker; and though we do not trace, step by step, the progress of Pierre Morin through the course of the day which commenced by his visit to the Abbé de Castelneau, we may say that to him it was a day of bustle and anxiety, that he was absent from his home during the greater part of the morning, and that, consequently, he had scarcely any time to labour on the basket, in constructing which we have seen him interrupted in the first chapter of this work. At night he resumed his labours; but, as may be well supposed, all the fatigue he had undergone during that day and those which preceded it, rendered repose absolutely necessary. He grew dull and heavy; the fine working of the silver required attention and care; and, after making several vain efforts to overcome the sleepiness that had fallen upon him, he abandoned the task and went to bed.

On the following morning early, the filigree-worker proceeded with quick steps to the house of the Abbé de Castelneau. Everything externally bore the same appearance as the day before. The door at the bottom of the stairs was open; and, without stopping to make any

inquiries at a small glass-covered apartment shaded by a green curtain, behind which no Parisian eye could doubt the person of a porter was to be found, Pierre Morin ran up the stairs with a quick step, but stood stupefied when he beheld a large board hung across the door of the abbé's apartments, and written thereon the significant intimation, "*Chambres garnies à louer. Parlez au portier.*"\*

Still Pierre Morin would not suffer himself to be convinced that the abbé was actually gone. He rang the bell that hung beside the door of the apartment, and knocked once or twice violently with his hand. No answer was returned, unless it were the hollow echoes of his own blows, which replied plainly enough, "Here is nothing but emptiness." He then went down and made application at the glass door we have mentioned, demanding where was the Abbé de Castelneau. The porter replied dryly that he did not know: how should he?

"Is he gone, then?" demanded the filigree-worker.

"To be sure," answered the porter: "he went yesterday evening, about three o'clock. He only had the apartments for a week."

The face of Pierre Morin fell as he heard this intelligence; and though by various questions he endeavoured to obtain farther information, all that he could ascertain was, that the abbé had apparently gone into the country, having taken his departure in a *chaise de poste*, the driver of which seemed to know in what direction he was to turn his horses' heads without being told. With this unsatisfactory intelligence the filigree-worker turned upon his way; but it was an hour or two after this period ere he re-entered his own chamber. He there, however, held a long conference with his wife as to all that had taken place before he proceeded to resume his work; and yet both seemed better satisfied than might have been expected under such circumstances, doubtless trusting that the child would be well taken care of, though it had been removed in a somewhat strange and suspicious manner. The labour on the basket was then recommenced, and during this night Pierre Morin worked at it without intermission.

It was about five o'clock in the morning when he finished it; and just as he was putting the last concluding

\* Meaning, "Furnished apartments to let. Inquire of the porter."  
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touch to the work, the rolling sound of rapid wheels rushing into the courtyard of the house, whose highest and most miserable story the artisan tenanted, told that some gay votary of pleasure and fashion was returning, probably from scenes of vice as well as dissipation, at the hour when the children of industry and want were rising from their hard couch, to begin the heavy passing of a day of toil. It was common in those times for many of the best and most splendid mansions in Paris to be divided among all the classes of society, though the arrangement of the tenants, indeed, was very different from that which existed in the social world. Lowest of all, we are told, except the rats and bottles that occupied the cellars, generally lived the proprietor of the house. He might be some avaricious or some decayed nobleman, whose health, purse, or inclination rendered him unwilling to climb even a single flight of stairs. Then came the gay, the luxurious, the fashionable, the man of the court and of society, inhabiting the wide and lofty rooms of the first floor. The *entresol* above gave accommodation to the smart young secretary of some public office, some foreign baron, or some of the numerous counts and princes that swarm in German and Italian courts. The second floor received the respectable merchant or banker, who had his offices and business in another part of the city; the widow lady, possessing affluence, but not riches; and all that numerous class, by no means the least happy or the least estimable, who are known by the name of *very respectable persons*. Above that, again, on the third, came the highest grade of men of letters, the academician, the celebrated professor, the philosopher in vogue, the great artist. On the fourth—for there was a fourth, ay, reader, and a fifth, and a sixth also—were people still at ease, and possessing all the necessaries of life; but possessing them, not only with the slight inconvenience of daily climbing up long flights of stairs, but often with the serious anxiety of providing for children for whom fortune had assigned no fund but the labour of a parent. Above these, again, came the poor artist, struggling forward with zeal and industry to make his merit known. The deep-thinking man of science, the result of whose investigations made or saved the fortunes of thousands, without giving him a sou; the moralist, the teacher, the man of letters, who disdained to pander to the bad taste

of a licentious public, or to employ the arts of the quack to gain fame, or wealth, or honours. Above these, again, was want, and misery, and destitution, the never-ceasing toil of all the various artists and artisans, the productions of whose hands ornamented the palace, the church, and the saloon; such men, in short, as our filigree-worker, who were brought too closely in contact with the dwellings of wealth, luxury, and vice, not to feel an additional pang, amid all the miseries of their own station, and to murmur at that social arrangement which allotted to them the whole of the dark side of life, and gave to beings often less worthy all that was bright and sunshiny.

The vices of the higher class of the Parisian people—their intemperance, their debauchery, their infidelity, their contemptible frivolity—were all indulged, enacted, and displayed under the very same roofs where dwelt misery, penury, and labour; and yet they wondered that there came a revolution!

Oh! would but man remember that he is but a steward of all that he possesses; that his wealth, his honours, his talents, his genius, his influence, are all merely lent to him by the one great Possessor, not alone for his individual benefit, but for the benefit of the whole; would he but remember this, such terrible accounts of the stewardship would not be taken as are often demanded on this earth by agents that seem little likely to be intrusted with such a commission; and the after-reckoning, too, might be looked for in peace, knowing that it is to be rendered to a mild and merciful Lord.

The filigree-worker cast himself down upon his bed, saying with a smile, “Others have come home to sleep, why should I not rest also?” But, though he did take a few hours’ repose, he was up and away long before the fevered gamester, whose wheels he had heard, entertained any thought of stirring from his restless couch.

The part of the world, however, towards which Pierre Morin now bent his steps, was all busy and stirring with a multitude of people, some animated alone by the hope of gaining that honest daily bread which in those days was with very great difficulty acquired by the lower orders of the Parisian people, but many others instigated by the dark spirit of that most degrading of all demons, Mammon, to rob the rich of their wealth and the poor of their labour.

Not far from the great Church of Nôtre Dame, somewhat behind it, but still a little to the right of that building, is a narrow street which has suffered little variation, except inasmuch as the shops with which it was filled at the time I speak of are now very much fewer in number than they then were, and are almost entirely devoted to the sale of such ornaments and utensils as are generally appropriated to the Church. Sacramental cups and salvers, crosses of all kinds, even the pastoral crook of the bishop, and the pix itself, are still there displayed; but, at the period of my story, every article worked in gold or silver was there to be found; and multitudes of trinkets of all kinds were ranged in the shop-windows, all along a street, every house of which was then the property of a goldsmith or a jeweller. At the corner of this street, in the best and largest shop that it contained, where one might just catch a view of solemn Nôtre Dame, rising blue and airy over the neighbouring houses, might be seen daily old Gaultier Fiteau, the famous jeweller, goldsmith, and money-changer. He was notorious for wealth, avarice, unscrupulous roguery, and the most delicate and tasteful goldsmith's work in Paris. He was of a harsh and a sour disposition, also, to all who came under his rod, pitiless to the poor, but submissive with the rich, and grasping and eager with all men. He was capricious, too, and would sometimes do a good action as if merely for a change; and the only permanent habit which bore the appearance of virtue in him was that of occasionally endeavouring to interest the rich in favour of the poor, and thus, as it were, to give alms by deputy. It was reported, however, that it was dangerous to trust Monsieur Fiteau with any donation for another, there being a certain oblivious power in his brain, which made him forget to give away anything that he had once received, and, even when reminded of it, enabled him not to recollect the exact amount.

It was to his shop, then, that Pierre Morin now hastened, bearing the basket which he had completed during the preceding night. The little shrivelled old man, the ugliness of whose countenance was only increased by an immense bearskin cap, received the poor filigree-worker with an angry and malevolent scowl. Much was the abuse he poured on the head of the artisan for the time which he had occupied in producing the basket.

He called him an idle and good-for-nothing fellow ; declared that he would be brought to beggary by his laziness ; and dwelt upon the idea of good Pierre Morin being reduced to utter starvation with the tone and manner of one who would receive from such a sight the utmost glee and satisfaction.

Pierre, who had a large fund of good-humour, bore all that the goldsmith said with the most perfect calmness and tranquillity ; but when Fiteau asked him, or, rather, commanded him to produce another basket exactly similar to the one he brought in the space of three days, the good artisan, remembering his promise to the Abbé de Castelneau, and that he had received some part of the money in advance, declared that he could not do it, assigning the true reason, that he had such another trinket to finish for a gentleman who had bespoke it.

This reply enraged the goldsmith to the highest possible degree, not so much because he wanted the basket soon, as because he was made indignant and apprehensive by the very thought of a mere artisan getting any larger share of profit than he chose to assign. He stormed, he raved, he grinned, and he declared that, unless Pierre abandoned the work altogether, he would never employ him again, even if he were starving.

Pierre remained firm, however, and thus they parted, the artisan resolving to do nothing else till he had prepared the basket for the abbé, in case it should be required. The abbé did not appear, however, and the basket remained on the filigree-worker's hands. Nevertheless, though it seems strange to say, he contrived to support himself well for nearly a month without having recourse to Monsieur Fiteau ; but the secret was this, that the nobleman on whose estates he was born, and who, seeing him a clever and intelligent youth, had paid the expenses of his education, and enabled him to learn the trade at which he now laboured, chanced to be at Paris about this time ; and Pierre having presented himself at his patron's house, though he never mentioned or even hinted at his poverty either to the gentleman himself or his only surviving daughter, received from each of them a present, which enabled him and his wife to live for the time we have stated with all the careless gayety of French peasants, enjoying the sunshine of the present hour to the very full, and not giving even a thought to the clouds of to-morrow. At the end

of the month, however, Poverty began daily to present herself under her most painful aspect ; and the filigree-worker, had he been one of those who are inclined frequently to ask for assistance, which indeed he was not, could not have obtained it in the same quarter, for the nobleman who had befriended him, and his daughter, had left Paris for a distant part of France ten days before.

He sat, then, one evening in April, fireless, supperless, and penniless ; and after first gazing in his wife's face with a melancholy look for some time, and then down upon the uncovered table, he started up, exclaiming in a gay tone, "Diable ! I will go to old Fiteau!"

Margiette did not try to dissuade him, though she very much feared that his application would prove vain ; and, tossing on his hat, with a light step, the buoyancy of which no poverty could take away, good Pierre Morin proceeded rapidly to the shop of Fiteau, which he feared might be closed before he arrived.

He found the usurious old goldsmith bustling about in his shop, putting away this article and that, and winding up all his affairs for the night. One half of the shop, which looked towards Nôtre Dame, was closed, and the other partly so, though two or three of the heavy iron-bound shutters were still down, in order that the nice calculator of expenses might not be obliged to light his lamp so long as there was one ray of light left in the sky. A boy of about fourteen years of age, the only assistant of any kind that he kept, and who served for clerk, shopman, porter, and everything else, was aiding his master to the best of his abilities, while a low irritable growl on the part of Fiteau showed that the lad's most zealous exertions were not successful in satisfying his master.

As soon as Pierre Morin entered the shop, Fiteau began upon him in a sharp tone, exclaiming, "Ah ! you idle scapegrace, I thought you would soon make your appearance again, expecting me to employ and assist you, when I have lost more money by your laziness than enough. Here, if you had been working for me, you might have gained half a louis between this time and twelve to-morrow. Here is a gold filigree bracelet to be made for the old Marquise de Pompignan, who goes to Versailles at one o'clock to-morrow, and will not wait a minute."

"Well, give me the wire," said Pierre Morin, "and I will do it before then. It is a mere nothing to work a bracelet: there is not half the labour in it that there is in a basket, such as I wrought last."

"I will not trust you, I will not trust you," replied the goldsmith, "you good-for-nothing fellow. I am just going to send the boy to your companion Launoy, to tell him to come hither and do it.. I will not trust you either with the gold or in regard to the time."

The assertion in regard to Launoy, indeed, was altogether false; for that workman had not quitted the shop ten minutes before, loaded with more work than he could possibly accomplish in the time allowed him. All the other workmen usually employed by old Fiteau were also fully occupied; and the thought of losing the order for the bracelet had been lying very heavy at the old miser's heart, when the appearance of Pierre Morin had given him a hope of seeing the work accomplished. Knowing, however, that the good lady for whom it was intended was of a tenacious and irritable disposition, he determined to find some means of guarding against any sort of idleness on the part of the filigree-worker, and he consequently took good care not to show his satisfaction at seeing him again, but continued to abuse him as bitterly as ever.

"I do not want to take the work from Launoy," said Pierre Morin, "if he wants it."

"Oh, no, no," interrupted the old goldsmith, fearful of overacting his part, "he does not want it: he has plenty of work every day in the week; but it is that I cannot and will not trust to you, you idle vagabond. But come, I will tell you what I will do," he continued, after a moment's pause. "Out of pure compassion, and for no other reason in the world, I will give you the work, if you will stay here and do it, and never go out of the little workroom there till it is done."

"And I am to have half a louis when it is done," said the filigree-worker. "Is that to be the bargain?"

"Nay, nay, I said eight livres," replied the goldsmith: "half a louis is too much."

"Not a whit for gold work," said the filigree-worker, who began to perceive that old Fiteau was somewhat more eager in the business than he pretended to be. "I will have that, or I will go elsewhere. It was what you offered at first, Master Fiteau."

"Well, well, you shall have it," replied the usurer. "Get you in, get you in, and I will lock the door upon you, to guard you against your own bad inclinations; keep you out of temptation. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Why, you do not suppose that I would steal all these things of yours if you left me here all night!" demanded Pierre Morin, pointing to the jewelry scattered round.

"I don't know, I don't know," answered the goldsmith. "Pretty things to look at, Master Morin; very tempting things; very tempting. I do not know that I might not steal them myself, if they were not my own. Safe bind, safe find, Master Morin; safe bind, safe find. I never leave any one in my shop when I am out of it. Here is an ounce of wire, and half a pennyweight of Venice gold; but where is the blowpipe? Oh, here it is in this drawer: the rest of the tools you will find there, and a lamp; there is some charcoal, too, and some crucibles."

Pierre Morin listened with a quiet smile till the old man had done; he then answered, however, "All very good, Master Fiteau; but I must go home and tell my wife before I begin. Why, she would be looking for me in the Morne\* to-morrow morning."

"Nonsense, nonsense," replied the goldsmith: "do you pretend to say that you never stay out at night without her knowing where you are?"

"Never, upon my life," replied Pierre Morin; "never since we were married to this hour, and that is six years ago come the Saturday before Martinmas. I promised her I never would, and I always keep my word, Master Fiteau."

"Except when you have work in hand, scapegrace," cried the miser, with a laugh. "But get you in, get you in. I will send the boy to tell your wife where you are. He has some twenty errands to do in the town, and has got to take up a crucifix and two rosaries to a house in the Rue Montmartre, so that he goes by your door."

"Then you must send her a livre to get her some

\* The place now called the Morgue was known by this more appropriate name in those days. It may be as well to state, for the benefit of persons not thoroughly acquainted with the topography of Paris, that it is the place where are exposed the corpses of unknown persons found dead, in order that they may be identified by their friends and relations. The writer of these pages has been in it several times, and seldom found it untenanted.

supper, Master Fiteau," said the filigree-worker: "she will want some comfort if I am not there."

It was with considerable difficulty that Monsieur Fiteau was induced to agree to this part of the bargain; but Pierre Morin saw that he had the advantage of his avaricious employer, and he would not go into his place of labour till he had seen the old goldsmith give the *livre* into the hands of the boy, and had made the boy promise to deliver it the first thing, assuring him that he would skin him alive if he did not keep his word. He then whistled a few bars of the last song which had been produced upon the Pont Neuf—my French readers will understand what I mean—and walked before the goldsmith, through a little back parlour, where Fiteau took his meals during the day (for he slept in another part of the town, and possessed no portion of this house but the ground-floor), into a small confined workshop, where was a little furnace well supplied with crucibles, and a table covered with various lamps and manifold kinds of tools. There was some little dispute between Fiteau and his workman as to the quantity of oil and coal that was necessary; but this being settled, Pierre Morin addressed himself seriously to his work, and Fiteau, creeping out of the room with his usual quiet and stealthy pace, was heard to lock the door behind him, as if he had been the jailer of a prison.

Pierre Morin went on with the bracelet; but presently finding the room too hot, he jumped upon a table and opened a small high window of about a foot square. He then returned to his work; and with the happy art of abstracting his thoughts from all subjects but that which was immediately before him, he gave himself up to the enjoyment which always proceeds from the practice of an art in which we are skilful, and for which we have a taste.

He was thus deep in the admiration of all the lines and figures he was working in the gold wire, when a sound struck his ear which made him pause for a moment. He resumed his work instantly, for he knew there was no time to spare; but he had scarcely taken another turn when he again listened, started up with a look of surprise and horror, looked to the door, recollected it was fastened, gazed up to the window, saw that it was barred, and then, seizing one of the instruments from the table, darted quickly to the other side of the room and put his hand on the lock.

## CHAPTER V.

LET the reader call to mind the description which we have given of the premises occupied by the goldsmith. There was the outer shop, with a long counter on either side, and a narrow passage between these two : behind that again was the inner shop or little parlour, and from it, through a small door, one entered the workshop, into which Gaultier Fiteau had locked the filigree-worker. All these rooms, except the shop, had windows so strongly barred that no human power could find the way in or out except by the legitimate entrance ; and the shop itself, open during the day, was secured at night by shutters covered with plates of iron. It may be remembered, that when Fiteau shut up the filigree-worker in the inner room, these shutters were principally closed. Two or three, however, were still down at that time ; and before the goldsmith suffered his boy to depart upon the numerous errands he had to perform, he made him aid in putting up these cumbrous defences, and fastened them tightly on the inside. The door of the shop did not bear the dignified decoration of plate glass, or any of those appearances by which shopdoors at present are distinguished from other doors, but was made of solid oak, studded and bound with iron, like the doors of a prison ; and strong must have been the hand, or cunning the device, which got it open when once it was closed.

As soon as the goldsmith had seen the shutters completely up, he found his way, by the faint light which came in through the still open door, to some small sparks of fire that were glimmering on the hearth in the other room ; and, lighting a lamp, gathered together all the various articles which the boy was to carry to their several destinations, put them into a closely-covered basket, hung it on the lad's arm, and despatched him on his way, while he himself hustled about his counters and drawers, placing everything in order, and all under lock and key.

When the boy issued forth into the street, knowing well the goldsmith's habits and character, he took care

to close with scrupulous exactness the door of the shop behind him, and then, safe from watchful eyes, he paused, looking round him on all sides, and enjoying the first moment of idle relaxation and freedom from the sharp superintendence of a careful and somewhat scolding master.

It was the twilight of an April evening : there was a calm bluish shade in the air which spoke of repose and peace ; the busy labours of the Parisian world were all over ; and as the boy looked up the street and down the street, calculating which would be the best and most amusing way to go—though in fact there was little difference between them—he beheld not a creature either to the right hand or to the left, and heard not a sound but distant murmurs from other parts of the city, and the clock of *Notre Dame* striking seven. The momentary pause which he made, however, brought a group of three people into the street on the left hand ; and, although there could be very little matter in their appearance to excite the lad's curiosity, yet he turned in that direction as soon as he saw them, and must have passed close by them had they not slowly crossed over the way in earnest conversation as they came near. The shadiness of the street, and the dark hue of the evening hour, prevented the boy from seeing as clearly who or what they were as he could have wished to do, for he was naturally of an inquiring disposition. One thing he did remark, that they seemed to be three gentlemen of good mien and apparel ; and, after giving them a steady and inquisitive glance, the boy passed on. He stopped at the nearest corner, however, to look back ; but, after a moment's halt, went forward again, and soon reached the more thronged and gayer part of Paris, where, by pausing to gaze at everything that attracted his attention, stopping to talk with this person and with that, and employing with considerable success all those means which boys about his age generally use for getting rid of the great adversary, Time, he contrived to loiter away the moments till half past nine o'clock of the same night.

In the mean time, old Fiteau soon brought the work of arrangement to a conclusion, and only remained in the shop to sum up, with his usual care, the loss and gain of the day, which he generally did upon a slate every evening, copying it into a large vellum-covered book the first thing on the following morning. This

night, however, he was suddenly interrupted in the midst of his calculation by a noise, as if some one laid his hand upon the lock of the outer door. The moment he heard it, the old man took a step forward from the other side of the shop with an eager look and trembling limbs, intending either to lock or bolt the door. But, before he could effect that purpose, the entrance of the blue twilight showed him that it was too late. The appearance of a face that he knew the moment after relieved his anxiety and apprehension, although the surprise and alarm which he had at first felt left his heart beating and his hand still shaking.

"Ah! monsieur le chevalier," he exclaimed, addressing the personage who entered, and who was a tall, powerful man, with a pale, worn, and somewhat sinister countenance, "you surprised and startled me. Did you not know I never do any business after my door is shut? Did the boy tell you I had not gone home?"

"No, indeed," replied the chevalier, who had been followed into the shop by another person somewhat less in size, but equally powerful in frame. "We did not see your boy. If he be out, I suppose you have no one who could carry something home for me were I to buy it?"

"Not I, not I," replied the goldsmith, somewhat impatiently. "Good-evening, count," he added, bowing low to the other; and then resuming his reply, he said, "I have no one to send till to-morrow; besides, I never sell by lamplight, and it is time for me to go home."

"If you never sell, do you buy, my dear Fiteau?" said the man whom he had called count, coming forward with a dull, unpleasant smile, which had far more of sneering contempt in it than either courtesy or kindness.

"No, no," replied Fiteau, "I neither buy nor sell at this time of night. Come, gentlemen, I must go home. I will talk to you by the way," and he moved a little towards the door. But the other two remained still in the way, and the one called by Fiteau the count replied with the same cold smile, "No, no, my dear Fiteau, you must not go home till you have done what I want. I am hard pressed for a little money to-night, and you must give me a hundred louis for this snuffbox. You know it well, and the diamonds upon it. If the cards are lucky to-night, I will take it back from you to-morrow, and pay you twenty louis to boot."

"I declare," cried Fiteau, at the first impulse, "I have

not a hundred louis in the place." But the moment he had said it he repented ; for there was a sort of haggard and ominous expression about the countenances of his two companions which gave him some vague alarm in regard to the consequences of offending them ; and he likewise knew that the snuffbox was worth much more than the sum required.

"That is a lie, Fiteau," answered the count, the moment the other spoke ; "for you know that you made the Abbé de Castelneau pay you five hundred louis not three hours since, whether he would or not, and well-nigh ruined him, poor fellow."

"I have paid money since, I have paid money since," exclaimed Fiteau : "it was to discharge my own debts I made him pay his : why did he change his lodging and hide himself?"

As he spoke, Fiteau remarked the eyes of his two visitors turn towards each other with a look that he did not at all like ; and, after a moment's pause, he added, "Well, well, I will see what I have got, I will see what I have got. I may have some ninety louis, if that will do. Let me have the box. The money is in that next room."

The count gave him the box, and the old man turned with a hasty step towards the little parlour, feeling, if the truth must be told, not for the key of the chest in which his money was kept, but for the key of the room in which Pierre Morin was at work. The moment he passed on thither, the two men who had entered his shop spoke a few rapid words to each other ; the one saying in a low tone, "Now, chevalier !" and the other replying, "No, you, you ! I will do the rest."

"Shut the door, then !" cried the count ; and, before the poor old goldsmith could reach the entrance of the workshop where Pierre Morin was locked in, a strong arm was thrown round him, a hand put over his mouth, the outer door of the shop closed, and the second villain was also upon him.

There is strength even in despair : the old man dropped the lamp which he carried, and which was instantly extinguished, got his mouth free for a moment, and gave a loud cry for help. Then, finding that he could not liberate himself from the arm that held him, by a straightforward effort he slipped down in spite of that strong grasp, avoiding a blow that was aimed at his head by

one of the assassins, which hit the other on the breast, and made him still farther relax his hold. All was now darkness, and, under cover thereof, the wretched old man strove to escape to the street door, but he was instantly caught again. Then came the terrible struggle for life or death, the writhing, the striving, the loud and agonized cry, the dull muttered curse, the faint groan, the gasp of anguish and destruction. Both the assassins were upon the ground bending over him, so eager in the terrible deed they were performing that they knew nothing, heard nothing but the sounds created by themselves and their victim. Scarcely, however, had the last faint cry passed from the lips of the miserable man, when a sudden light burst into the room, and one of the murderers instinctively started up. Before he was prepared to resist, however, or to act in any way, a tall powerful man was upon him, and he was struck to the ground by the blow of a hammer. The chevalier was upon his feet in a moment, as soon as he saw his companion fall; and, dropping the knife, which was wet with the heart's blood of poor Fiteau, he drew his sword upon Pierre Morin, while the count struggled up again upon his knee. The artisan, unarmed and overmatched, darted past them; but he would not have escaped unhurt, had not the assassin, in lunging at him, stumbled over the prostrate body of the murdered man and fallen, dyeing himself in the gore with which the floor was covered.

Seizing the opportunity, Pierre Morin darted into the outer shop, banged to the door which separated it from the little parlour or counting-house, and, though one of the villains pulled strongly from the inside, he succeeded, by a great effort, in keeping it closed with his left hand till he had turned the key in the lock with his right.

When this was done, the good artisan put his hand to his brow to collect his bewildered thoughts, and then felt his way, with his brain whirling and his breast oppressed, to the door of the shop, which he opened and went out into the air.

The moment that he stood beyond the threshold, a man wrapped in a dark cloak appeared beside him, demanding eagerly, "What was that cry? Was the old man there? You have not killed him?" Scarcely were the words uttered, when he seemed suddenly to perceive that he was speaking to a stranger, and darted away at full speed.

Pierre Morin stooped to pick something up from off the ground, and then instantly gave the alarm, shouting loudly for aid, and ringing all the bells of the houses round. A crowd was soon gathered; men and women, porters, lackeys, gentlemen, and merchants, poured forth from their houses, and listened with wondering ears to the tale of the artisan.

The shop of poor Gaultier Fiteau was surrounded by the crowd, and the lieutenant-general of police was sent for; but till he came, Pierre Morin could not prevail upon any one to enter the house, although he represented to the multitude that the old jeweller might not yet be dead: such was the feeling of awe which the population of Paris entertained at that time towards the police. Very speedily, however, the lieutenant-general appeared in person, with manifold officers and flambeaux, and, having heard the story of the artisan, he spoke a word or two to one of the persons who accompanied him, and proceeded with his own hand to open the door of the house. A pause took place while the lieutenant, taking a torch in his hand, looked in, but all was vacant and as silent as the grave. The chief officer of police then advanced between the two counters, followed by the rest, without a word being said. He stopped a moment to gaze at a small, dark stream of blood, which found its way out from underneath the door between the shop and the parlour, and muttered to himself, "Here is evidence of the deed."

He then unlocked the door and threw it open. The moment he did so, however, two men burst forth, and made a violent effort to break through. The lieutenant-general of police himself was knocked down, and some of those behind him recoiled. But the moment the count and the chevalier saw the exempts, their courage seemed to abandon them, and they were taken in a moment. On examining the room, it was found that the unfortunate goldsmith was quite dead; and whether it was that the two men, supposing any persons who came to apprehend them would be without lights, fancied they might escape better in the darkness, or whether, as some people imagined, the sight of their own deed was too horrible for them to bear, it is certain that they had put out the lamp which Pierre Morin had left lighted in the workshop, and had thus remained for a considerable length of time, it would appear, in the midst of dark-

ness, with the body of him they had killed lying close beside them.

What had been their sensations, what had been their thoughts during the interval? Nobody has ever known; but it is evident that they had conferred together as soon as they had found that it was impossible to escape from the scene of their crime, and had arranged the story they were to tell, or, rather, the account they were to give of the event which had taken place.

As soon as the lieutenant-general of police had raised himself from the ground, on which he had been cast by the furious rush of the two criminals, he ordered them to be removed and kept separate; and, at the same time, after speaking a few words to one of his exempts, he nodded to Pierre Morin, saying, "I will talk with you farther presently."

The good artisan was somewhat surprised to find the exempt take him by the arm and lead him away from the scene in which he thought that the information he had to give might be most particularly required. He was still more surprised, however, to find that he was to be carried to the house of the lieutenant, and shut up in a room by himself, with very little difference between him and the criminals against whom he was to bear witness.

The room in which he was placed, indeed, contained a bed; and for that luxury poor Pierre Morin would have been even more grateful than he was, if he had been thoroughly acquainted with all the transactions which from time to time took place in Paris under the paternal care of the police of the French metropolis.

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## CHAPTER VI.

The mind of the good filigree-worker was not one to be impressed easily with feelings of apprehension. He thought it very strange and very disagreeable that he who had given the first alarm, who had aided with such effect to seize the murderers, who was the only living witness, in fact, of the crime, should thus be detained in solitude, with the key of the door turned upon him.

With natural lightness of heart, however, he soon forgot the small evils of his situation ; and after revolving for some time all the horrible images which the scenes of that night had presented to his eyes, he exclaimed "*Peste !*" three times, and, having thus satisfied the goddess of wonder, he cast himself down upon the bed and fell sound asleep. He was still quietly and happily slumbering when the morning light began to shine through the high window, and one of the agents of the police, entering without being heard, gazed at the sleeping artisan for a minute or two, as if to read on his countenance the secrets that might be in his bosom.

Nor is it at all improbable that such was really his intention, for everything in that day was a matter of espionage throughout the whole city of Paris. The very thoughts of men were subjects of minute investigation by the government ; and it was supposed that all things could be performed by the cunning inquisition of the police into the actions, ideas, and feelings of the citizens. Not the judge upon the bench, not the minister in his cabinet, not the prisoner in his dungeon, not the profligate in the lowest resorts of vice and iniquity, was without a spy nearer to him than he imagined, marking all and sometimes revealing all. In such circumstances, it may appear that no evil could be committed, no crime take place, unpunished ; but yet both occurred every day. The mass of wickedness, vice, and folly was perhaps greater than at any other period, and, in proportion, very few offences were brought under the eye of the law.

Two causes combined to produce this effect. In the first place, with an active and clever nation, art naturally met art ; and in the space of fifty or sixty years, the police had actually drilled and trained the people to outwit them on very many occasions. It might be perfectly well known to the lieutenant-general that such and such a priest or abbé had been in this or that abode of licentiousness, and yet the lieutenant might have no idea of what criminal or treasonable meeting he had been at half an hour before or afterward. In the next place, the honourable society of *mouchards*, as the spies were called in France, had its own particular rules and regulations, its own peculiar habits and prejudices, vested rights and privileges, which were very frequently extremely inconvenient and annoying to the officers above

them. A certain portion of information they felt themselves bound to afford; but they would afford no more unless they were either very highly paid for it, or some special case was pointed out, in regard to which the police really wished to get accurate and complete information. The general mass of wickedness which they discovered, and, indeed, the particular instances of crime either committed or meditated, were seldom, if ever, revealed unless some great object was to be gained; so that it is clearly ascertained many a man has been allowed to go about Paris for three, four, five, or six years, when his life was entirely in the hands of six or seven infamous spies, whose views and purposes it did not suit to inform the police against him.

It sometimes happened that small or large bribes were given to procure this immunity; but, more frequently still, the reticence of the *mouchards* was not at all mercenary; for they were a philosophical race of men, and saw things in an extended point of view. They were, indeed, so fully and generally convinced of the necessity of crime and wickedness of all kinds for the encouragement of their trade and for the extension of their emoluments, that they would have been very sorry indeed to have given any serious discouragement to vice. They looked upon the world, in short, as a great orchard, where sins were produced for their benefit; and though they might gather the fruit, they would have been very sorry indeed to cut down the trees.

Let it be remembered, all this time, that I am speaking alone of the city of Paris, which, although the citizens looked upon it as "France," and both in their speech and notions had a certain confusion of ideas upon the subject, which made them believe that Paris comprised everything in the world, and that France was only a small quarter or portion of it—let it be remembered, I say, that I am speaking alone of Paris, which was not, after all, the whole country. For a certain distance in the environs of the capital the influence of the French police and the system of espionage was felt. All the very large towns, too, of course, aped the metropolis in its public and its private vices; but there were wide tracts of country to which the system of espionage did not extend; and respecting which, as was afterward lamentably proved, the French government

possessed no information whatsoever, as far, at least, as regarded the wants and wishes, habits and character, of the people.

To return, however, from this long digression to good Pierre Morin and the agent of police. The latter—who had been originally a *mouchard*, and had afterward been elevated to the dignity of an exempt, without losing his taste for the science to which he had originally addicted himself—having gazed, as we have said, for some time upon the countenance of the filigree-worker, and being satisfied by all he saw that the man was sleeping the sleep of innocence, pulled him by the arm and woke him with a sudden start. “Come, come, sir,” he said, “get up! the lieutenant of police wants to speak to you directly. You must come and tell what you know of this murder last night.”

Now every Parisian who was not a *mouchard* bore a vast share of hatred and enmity to all individuals of that class, and scarcely less to officers of police; and Pierre Morin, consequently, was not at all disposed to hold any long conference with his companion. He shook himself in silence, without feeling very much discomposed by having slept in his clothes, and followed to the especial apartments of the lieutenant-general of police, where he was detained some time in an antechamber without seeing that officer.

At length, however, he was summoned to the great man’s presence, and found him sitting in his bedroom, robed in an embroidered dressing-gown, and eating various savoury ragouts as a preparation for the labours of the day. It may seem that such a place and such a time were not very fit to receive the deposition of a witness in a case of murder; but things were so done in Paris in those days; and the lieutenant of police thus lost no time in eating his chicken and his sweetbreads, drinking his Burgundy and water, and questioning Pierre Morin with the most admirable perseverance and determination.

Although a lieutenant of police was always a very awful sort of personage in the eyes of the lower order of Parisians, and even of the higher classes also, yet the good artisan was seldom without having all his wits about him; and he answered the questions which were asked of him with veracity, clearness, and precision. He told his tale not only truly, but accurately; for

though, at first sight, truth and accuracy may seem to be the same thing, yet in operation they are very different. Many a man who tells a story which is perfectly true is not believed, because he fails to put all things in their proper order, to add all the particulars which elucidate the facts, and give the whole the air of verity. Pierre Morin, however, entered into all the details ; informed the lieutenant of his visit on the preceding night to the unhappy man who had been murdered ; related their conversation with so much point and truth, that the officer himself smiled at the painting of the character of old Fiteau, which was well known in Paris ; and the artisan then proceeded to tell how the goldsmith had locked him up in the room, in order that his work might be done by the time required.

"I know not well," he continued, "how long I had been there, when I heard what I thought a cry, which seemed suddenly stifled. I persuaded myself it was nothing, however, and went on ; but I had scarcely given the pincers a turn when there was a terrible sound of struggling in the next room, and I heard the voice of old Fiteau crying 'Help! help! murder! murder!' There were bars upon all the windows, so there was no way to get out but by the door. As I knew that was locked, and it would take time to break the fastenings off, I snatched up one of the chasing chisels, and with it forced back the lock. When the door was open I found the other room all dark, but the lamp I had been working with lighted it up in a minute. The first thing I saw was the poor old man upon the ground, with two men dressed like gentlemen on their knees over him ; one squeezing his mouth and head down upon the floor with his hand, while the other seemed stabbing him with a knife. The minute I came in, one started up—"

"Stay, stay," said the lieutenant ; "you say stabbing him with a knife : their swords were not drawn, then ?"

"No, no," replied Pierre Morin, "there were no swords drawn at that time ; not, indeed, till I had knocked the man down with my hammer who first started up."

"Where is the hammer ?" demanded the lieutenant.

"Here," answered Pierre Morin, taking it out of his pocket and giving it to the officer, who held out his hand for it.

"Go on," said the lieutenant : "what happened next ?"

“Why, then,” replied Pierre Morin, “the other, who was upon his feet by this time, rushed at me, drawing his sword; but poor old Fiteau helped me at that pinch, though he was as dead as Ste. Geneviève, for the scoundrel stumbled over him before he could run me through with his rapier. Thereupon I scrambled out of the door as fast as I could, and, banging it to, locked it upon them. They struggled hard to get it open, but they could not; though, if they had not been two fools, or else stupefied by what they had done, they would have soon picked the lock with all the tools that I left there. In the mean while I ran out of the shop and gave the alarm; and you yourself, monseigneur, know all the rest.”

It will be remarked, in this account, that good Pierre Morin did not think fit to say one word—on the present occasion, at least—concerning the person whom he had seen on the outside of the door. It might be forgetfulness, it might be a certain feeling of compassion or good-nature, which made him not wish to implicate a man, of whose guilt he had no certain proof, in so terrible an accusation. There was no necessity, it is true, of saying anything more unasked; for, as soon as he had given the mere details of the murder, the lieutenant of police began to question him in a closer manner.

“So,” he said, “you intend me to believe all this?”

“Indeed I do, monseigneur,” replied Pierre Morin; “and, what’s more, you do believe it, I can see very well: you are not the man to mistake between truth and falsehood when they are put before you, I am sure.”

“Indeed,” said the lieutenant of police, with a sarcastic smile at the broad flattery which the peasantry of France are almost as ready to apply as the peasantry of Ireland, thinking it nothing more than common courtesy after all, “Indeed, you are certainly a man of genius, Monsieur Pierre Morin; and though you are clearly new to the trade, you have as much impudence as the oldest *filou* in Paris. You do not do great honour to my penetration, however, when you tell me this ridiculous story of the sordid old goldsmith leaving you on his premises all night, and of your consenting to remain shut up in a room till he chose to set you free in the morning.”

“If you will not believe that, monseigneur,” replied Pierre Morin, perfectly calmly, “pray tell me what you will believe?”

“Why, probably,” answered the lieutenant of police, “that you are yourself one of the accomplices, left in the outer shop while your two companions did the deed within; and that, alarmed by the old man’s cries, or by somebody coming, you shut the door upon the others and gave the alarm. It was a clever trick, I must own, and, as such, should not go without its reward. If you will confess the whole, then, and bear witness against these two friends of yours, you shall have a pardon yourself, and we may do something for you. No man ever makes so good an exempt as one who has been apprehended two or three times himself. What say you?”

“Oh, monseigneur, I will bear witness against the two willingly,” replied Pierre Morin; “but there is another, a very honest fellow, whom I will not bear witness against, and his name is Pierre Morin.”

The lieutenant of police seemed to be amused with the good artisan’s quickness of retort; and, being very well convinced that the other had nothing to do with the murder, he dropped the tone in which he had been speaking, and said, “Well, well, let us hear what you can bear witness to.”

“To everything I saw,” replied Pierre Morin.

“Not so quick, not so quick,” cried the lieutenant: “what was the precise hour at which you went to the shop of old Fiteau?”

“I can’t exactly say to a minute,” replied the artisan, “for I neither looked at the clock nor heard it strike; but it was just that hour when the western sky is all red and gold, and the eastern is of a mouse colour.”

“That is to say, about half past six,” said the lieutenant: “and pray what time did the boy go?”

Now although, as we have said, the criminal lieutenant was perfectly well convinced that Pierre Morin was innocent of any share of the murder, and, moreover, recollect ed that the artisan had said the boy was in the shop when Fiteau shut him up in the workroom, yet such was his habit of trying to entangle men in their talk, that he could not resist putting this question, simply to see what answer the filigree-worker would make.

“Just at seven o’clock,” replied the artisan at once, very much to the surprise of the lieutenant.

“Indeed!” said the officer: “pray which way did he go?”

"That I can't tell," replied Pierre Morin, with a laugh. "I was shut up in the workroom, you know."

"Then pray how can you tell at what hour he went?" demanded the officer.

"Because," answered Pierre Morin, grinning at having puzzled the magistrate, "because I had jumped up on the table to open a bit of the small window, and I heard old Fiteau say to the boy, 'Be quick, you sloth, be quick, and do not lose time by the way.' Then, the moment the door was shut, the boy began a tune that I often heard him whistle before, but stopped when Notre Dame struck seven, because, I suppose, its song and his did not sound well together."

The lieutenant-general smiled; for mental fencing was an art in which he took great delight, even when his opponent parried skilfully his attack. "Bring in the boy Pierre Jean," he said to a clerk who was writing busily at a table not far off; and the obsequious and silent noter down of other men's sayings and doings rose without a word, glided out of the room, and returned as quietly with poor Fiteau's errand-boy. The youth was all aghast at the awful presence into which he was brought, and seemed just in that state in which a skilful cross-examiner can contrive to make a witness say anything he pleases.

"Pray what were the last words your master said to you last night?" said the lieutenant-general of police. "Mark me, *the last words he said to you?*"

"He said—he said," replied the boy, looking first up to the ceiling and then down upon the floor, "he said, 'Carry that to Madame de Rohan's.' That's the last thing he said."

The lieutenant of police grinned; but, before he could interpose, the filigree-worker had exclaimed, "What did he say to you outside the door, Pierre Jean?"

A look of intelligence came up into the boy's face at the sound of a familiar voice, and he replied at once, "Oh, he said then, 'Be quick, be quick, and do not lose time by the way; and he called me a sloth, too, though I always make as much haste as I can."

It was now Pierre Morin's turn to grin, and the boy having been sent out of the room, the lieutenant of police proceeded to interrogate the artisan upon various other points. The first of these was in reference to what he had done with the instrument employed in for-

cing back the lock. Next, he strongly and severely cross-examined him as to which of the murderers had the knife in his hand, and which was stifling the voice of the unfortunate goldsmith at the moment when the filigree-worker made his way into the room.

To all his questions the answers of Pierre Morin were clear, definite, and pointed. He never hesitated, or contradicted himself, or varied in the slightest particular from any statement that he made; and still, as he answered, the clerk at the neighbouring table took rapid notes of all his replies. The character of the artisan rose very high in the opinion of the lieutenant-general of police, not so much on account of the moral rectitude he displayed—for the officer of police had no objection to a good rogue on an occasion—as on account of his quickness, precision, and presence of mind, which, as is very evident, are high qualities in those who have anything to do with such subjects as come under the notice of the police.

After having questioned the artisan for more than half an hour, he suddenly asked him if he could write; and, receiving an affirmative answer, he made him transcribe two or three sentences, which he looked at with an approving exclamation, and then bade him go into the next room and wait for him there.

Pierre Morin found in the neighbouring chamber several exempts, in the dress which was at that time worn by those personages, and two other people in plain clothes, who were, in fact, officers of the police of a superior class and less ostensible functions. These were the persons who, armed with a *lettre de cachet* and with a sufficient body of inferiors, unseen, but within call, would whisper a few words with a soft air to clergyman or nobleman, warrior or magistrate, in the midst of a gay assembly or a public promenade, and the spectators would see the cheek grow pale, the smile wither away upon the lip, the knees tremble, and the eyes lose their light, as the victim of arbitrary power followed a mandate which could not be resisted.

Pierre Morin looked about for the boy, and, not seeing him as he expected, he ventured to ask one of the exempts where he was. The officer looked at him with a smile somewhat contemptuous, and then replied, "You will soon learn, my friend, that in this room nobody asks any questions or answers any."

"I am sure they ask enough in the other," replied Pierre Morin.

"There is another chamber still," replied the exempt, "where they employ only one, but which you might find somewhat difficult to bear if you were put to it."

This plain allusion to the torture quelled all poor Pierre Morin's gayety in a moment, and he remained in dead silence till, after some coming and going between the room in which he sat and that in which he had left the lieutenant of police, he was taken down the stairs by one of the exempts, and put into a *fiacre*, which rolled away towards the Châtelet. At the door of that building stood the carriage of the lieutenant of police, who had preceded the artisan by a few minutes; and, on passing through the small wicket into the interior of that gloomy and awful abode of wretchedness and crime, the porter whispered something to the exempt, who paused in his progress, and seeing that poor Pierre Morin had advanced a step or two before him, he told him to stand back till he was called for. "People get in here fast enough," he said, in a sullen tone; "you may find it more difficult to get out again."

The good filigree-worker very easily believed the words of the exempt; and, in fact, his advance had been rather the effect of agitation at finding himself in such a place than of alacrity. What he was brought there for he knew not; and although he derived some hope of not being detained there, from the circumstance of the criminal lieutenant having preceded him, yet many a vague and horrible apprehension was raised in his breast by the sight of those dark arches and heavy walls, which were but too terribly famed in French history. In this state of uncertainty and fear, the poor artisan would gladly have turned his attention to anything but his own situation; and an immense large dog, with a leathern collar bristling with iron spikes, which stood beside the jailer,\* was the first object with which he endeavoured to employ himself. On putting out his hand, however, to pat the animal's head, he found that it was inspired by the spirit of the place; first snapping violently at the hand that attempted to caress it, and then, after looking

\* Each of the turnkeys of the Châtelet at this time was followed by one or more of these dogs, who, we have reason to believe, were taught to drive the prisoners hither or thither like flocks of beasts. They were trained, too, we are told, with extraordinary care.

at him fiercely for a moment, flying at his throat with a sharp yell. The turnkey laughed, but made a sign with his finger to the dog, which instantly retreated to his master's side.

A long silence ensued; but Pierre Morin was neither of an age, nor a nation, nor a character to remain long still and unoccupied; and, after fixing his eyes for a minute or two on some object on the other side of the court, he moved a little towards a large heavy wooden case which stood close by the wicket. It bore evident signs of having been constructed many years before; was in shape like a very large coffin; and Pierre Morin would willingly have asked what was its use, had he not received more than one severe rebuke in the course of the morning. The eyes of the jailer, however, followed him, and then turned towards the exempt with a grim and meaning smile.

"Do you know what that is, my good youth?" the turnkey said, at length. "That is what we call *the crust of the pie*."

Poor Pierre Morin was as much in the dark as ever; and, not choosing to ask anything farther, he remained murmuring, "The crust of the pie! The crust of the pie!"

"Ay," said the turnkey, after having suffered him to puzzle himself with the matter for some time, "the crust of the pie; that is to say, it is the *cercueil bannal*, the coffin of the quarter. Now you see that when one of our pets dies, which generally happens every other day, we pop him in there at once, and send him to the burying ground, where he lies quite as comfortably in his shroud as if he had ever so many feet of oak round about him. That is a needless luxury, too, a shroud: I don't see why we should give them a shroud; they give us nothing but trouble."

"And do you bury them directly?" said Pierre Morin, in a low voice,

"To be sure," replied the turnkey: "what should we keep them above ground for? We give half an hour to make sure that it's all right, and then we cart them off. It sometimes happens, indeed, that one of our *pailleux*\* dies while another is sickish, and then we wait till we see if the other won't go too: you see the crust of the

\* A name given to the prisoners, from their lying on straw in their dungeons.

pie is big enough to hold more than one partridge ;" and, laughing aloud at his own joke, he gave the public coffin a kick with his foot, and then added, as it returned a dull, hollow sound, " It is empty now, but I put three in it yesterday, so that may do for a day or two at least."

It is astonishing how familiarity hardens the heart of man to human suffering, and steels us against all the strange and horrible things of earthly existence ; but there are some men who, without any such terrible training, feel a pleasure in the sight of sorrow ; derive a sort of agreeable excitement from witnessing the pangs and miseries of life in others. I once met with a man who had been the public executioner in a large city of France during the most sanguinary period of the Revolution. He had become a cripple in consequence of wounds afterward received in war, and had known in his own person much of the anguish and sorrow which he had formerly aided to inflict upon others ; but yet, when I asked him if he did not look back with horror and regret at those times and deeds, he laughed and said, " Not at all ;" that he only wished such days would come back again, and that he were able to cut off the dogs' heads as before. His eyes, too, sparkled when he spoke on the subject, so as to leave no doubt of his sincerity.

Such a one was the turnkey with whom the good Pierre Morin was now speaking ; and, although he very well understood that the artisan was not likely to remain under his gentle custody, yet he took a delight in stirring up all sorts of apprehensions in his bosom and in presenting every painful and disagreeable object to his mind that the place could suggest.

He was not suffered to go on much longer, however, for, in a minute or two after the above dialogue had taken place, a messenger came to summon Pierre Morin and the exempt to the presence of the lieutenant of police. They found him at one end of a large hall, seated in an arm-chair, with two or three clerks at a table beside him, and at the other end of the room some twenty or thirty prisoners, with a number of jailers and archers, as they were still called, though it must be understood that the bow and arrow had long disappeared from among them.

" Come hither," said the criminal lieutenant, beckoning to Pierre Morin ; and when the artisan had approach-

ed his side, he added, in a lower voice, " You are to understand by the words ' number one' the man who had the knife ; by ' number two' the man who held the goldsmith down. Mark all these prisoners as they pass before you ; and when you recognise either of the assassins, say ' number one' or ' number two,' as the case may be."

He paused for a few moments after he had spoken, and then made a sign to one of the turnkeys, upon which the prisoners, one by one, were ordered to march forward, and, passing before the lieutenant and those who surrounded him, to make their exit by a door on his left hand.

To the eye of a philosopher it might have been a curious and interesting spectacle to trace, in the aspect of those unhappy men, the effects of imprisonment, under various circumstances, upon their several characters. There was the gay, light debauchee, who had found his way into the Châtelet in consequence of some criminal intrigue or idle quarrel, passing on upon the tips of his toes as lightly and thoughtlessly as if he had never committed evil or endured sorrow. There was the man of deeper feelings, bowed down by the sense of crime or shame, walking forward with the eye bent upon the ground and the flushed hectic of anxious care upon his cheek. There was the daring and brutal criminal, hardened in offences and impudent in iniquity, staring full in the faces of those before whom he passed, and seeming almost inclined to whistle, as if in defiance of the authority which he believed had done its worst upon him. Then came the dull and heavy man of guilt and despair, who bore about with him the memories of many years' imprisonment and exclusion from all social intercourse, with the light of hope gone out in his eye and in his heart, and nothing left but tenacity of life and capability of endurance. But who was that who came at length, with a bold and even menacing brow, with a firm step and measured military tread, but, withal, a restless and anxious eye, and a lip which quivered—it might be with anger, it might be with apprehension ?

" Number two," said the artisan, aloud, as the prisoner passed, without the slightest hesitation, and with a firm, distinct, and even solemn voice, as if his mind were much affected by the importance of the occasion and the awful duty that fell upon him.

"Are you quite sure?" demanded the lieutenant, in a low tone.

"As I live!" replied Pierre Morin; and immediately the lieutenant made a sign with his finger to one of the archers, who followed the prisoner out.

Two or three others now passed in succession before the lieutenant and his party without a word being said by the good artisan. At length, however, there appeared a personage of distinguished mien, who advanced with a graceful and easy step, slow, calm, and deliberate, with no sort of expression upon his countenance which could at all indicate the feelings of his heart, unless it were a slight but somewhat supercilious smile, as if contempt for the whole proceeding mastered every other sensation.

"Number one," said the artisan, firmly; and the other, without taking any notice, passed on. Two more prisoners followed without notice; and then the lieutenant of police, rising, gave some directions in a low voice to the officer near him.

"Come hither, my friend," he said at length, turning to Pierre Morin. "We have seldom such fellows as you to deal with; but get you home, and rest in peace till I send for you again. Never be out of the house, however, for a whole day together till this business is over; and if you behave as well at the trial as you have done to-day, we will give you something better to do than twisting silver wire into fligree baskets."

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## CHAPTER VII.

In all the streets and alleys of the city of Paris, in the squares and along the quays, there was a continual cry kept up, during the whole of the morning of the 30th of April, by a number of men, whose stout lungs had acquired redoubled power by the constant practice of shouting forth whatever was calculated to excite the curiosity of the Parisian public.

"*Arrêt de mort! Arrêt de mort!* Sentence of death! Sentence of death!" cried the sturdy hawkers, as they ran through the streets with bundles of printed papers

in their hands, selling, for a small piece of copper, to the eager multitude the judgment of the law in the trial of the Count de H— and the Chevalier de M—, for the cold-blooded and deliberate murder of the old goldsmith, Gaultier Fiteau.

The people read the sentence with surprise and terror, for the names of both the condemned announced noble blood and high station; and the punishment, the horrid punishment of the wheel, was one which, in the memory of man, had never been inflicted on any but one of lowly race. Almost daily, indeed, the people saw one of their own class undergo the same terrible fate without wonder or horror; and many who witnessed with their own eyes the bloodshed and the agony, prepared, the very next day, by some similar crime to that of the wretch who had just expired, to take their place on the same scaffold where he had suffered. But now—oh strange human nature!—the very same persons, who beheld the punishment almost with indifference in men of a lower rank, attached feelings of awe and horror to it which they had never felt before, now that it was to be inflicted upon the nobles of the land. They in fact transferred, by a strange process of the human mind, the abhorrence which they should have felt for the additional guilt implied by the circumstance of education to the punishment about to be inflicted, and viewed the wheel with sensations with which they had never regarded it before.

Such was the popular feeling upon the occasion of this condemnation; but among the nobles themselves still more agitation and horror existed. Pride came into play in their case; the pride of blood, and of that rank which had long given them a certain degree of immunity in the commission of evil. The privileges of their station, they fancied, extended to all and everything. They were indignant at the very sentence pronounced by the court, that two noblemen should be broken on the wheel like common felons; and they doubted not—they would not doubt—that the sentence would be commuted, even if the criminals were not pardoned. At first they had the daring to ask for absolute pardon; but the stern countenance with which they were received soon taught them that they must be more moderate, and a commutation was all that was required.

The answer was, "It is impossible;" and now every

argument and entreaty was made use of to obtain some mitigation : thousands of the nobility flocked to the palace ; conferences were held among themselves ; and it was represented to the prince who then governed France that the criminals were connected with all the first families in the land. They urged the horror, the shame, and the disgrace it would be to many a high and noble person, if the degrading sentence, usually pronounced upon a conviction of common felons, should be carried into effect against two men of so high a rank. The prince was immovable, however ; and to every entreaty urged upon these grounds, he replied, "It is the crime that makes the disgrace, and not the punishment."

The fatal day arrived ; and though, till the last moment, efforts were still made, still, at the appointed hour, the dark procession began to move from the Châtelet to the Place de Grève, and the awful scene of public execution was enacted without one particular of the sentence being omitted in the punishment of the murderers of Gaultier Fiteau. Limb by limb, and bone by bone, they were broken on the wheel by the iron bar of the executioner ; and the cries of even the firmest of the two made the air around ring, till they had no longer strength to utter more than a mere entreaty for water to quench their burning thirst, and for the blow of death to terminate their agony.

While this awful scene was enacting in the Place de Grève, and while it was producing its effect, not only upon the minds of those who witnessed the punishment, but upon the higher as well as the lower orders of France, our good friend Pierre Morin remained closeted with the lieutenant-general of police, talking over many matters of no slight interest to the good artisan. At length the conference closed, and the filigree-worker issued forth into the streets, and took his way towards a part of the town which went by the name of the Temple.

Not only those who had only seen him, as we have described him in the first chapter of this work, clothed in his labouring jacket and leathern apron, but those also who had beheld him in his holyday suit, ready to join the dance at the *guingette*, would have been equally puzzled to recognise our old friend Pierre Morin, as he now appeared in the streets of Paris. He was dressed in a handsome suit of black, with his hair nicely combed and

cut into the fashionable shape ; his hands, which were somewhat too brown, at that time, for the rest of his appearance, were covered with fine gloves ; he had a small sword by his side in a black sheath, and a new hat upon his head, in shape somewhat between that of the court beau and the young lawyer. Thus adorned was the outward man of good Pierre Morin ; nor did he himself at all disgrace his habiliments. His good countenance naturally appeared to better advantage in a more becoming dress, and his powerful and fine person was equally benefited by the change of his garments. He seemed perfectly at ease in them also, and walked as if his leg had never known anything but a silk stocking, and his foot had been pressed by nothing coarser than cordovan. As he passed through the lieutenant's antechamber, some of the exempts looked at him with a grin, but their faces became composed into decent gravity the moment that he turned towards them. On his way along the street, if any persons remarked him particularly, they might place him in their own minds among some of those not over rich but rising classes, which were the general wearers of black coats at that time in Paris ; the successful literary men, the poorer members of the Academy, the promising artist, the celebrated musician. But the dress of Pierre Morin was well chosen, for it was of all others that which was best calculated to pass without attracting any attention whatsoever.

Thus, as he walked on towards the Temple, he brushed against more than one distant acquaintance without receiving anything but a casual look, and not the slightest sign or token of recognition. Pierre Morin took no notice of them either ; but it must not be inferred from that fact that the good artisan was one to suffer fortune to change favour. It was not in the slightest degree that he forgot or despised his former acquaintances ; his heart was as warm and as kindly, as honest and as true, as ever. But Pierre Morin had other objects in view ; a new course of life was open before him ; and he hoped, even in doing his duty therein, to be enabled to serve and assist some, in whose welfare he took a high and unselfish interest.

One of those whom he thus passed as he went on slowly towards the Temple was no other than our friend the Abbé de Castelneau, who was walking heavily for-

ward, with his eyes bent upon the ground, his countenance paler than usual, and his lips shut tight together, as if some bitter and anxious thoughts were labouring in his bosom. Though Pierre Morin had sought for him anxiously, as the reader already knows, and had been much disquieted by not finding him, he would not be tempted by any consideration to stop him and speak with him now. The abbé, on his part, lifted his eyes for a moment to the artisan's face as he passed, but did not appear to recognise him in the slightest degree; and their clothes brushed against each other without the wearers' speaking. It must be recollected, indeed, that the difference in those days between the dress of an artisan and that of a gentleman was very, very much greater than it is at present; so that it was not at all astonishing the abbé, who had seen Pierre Morin only twice, should not at all recollect him in his present garb. After proceeding upon the errand which took him to the Temple, a place which was then invested with the privileges of sanctuary, so far, at least, as the protection of debtors from their creditors went—for the right of shielding criminals from the arm of the law had long been done away with altogether—Pierre Morin returned to his home, where he found his good wife Margiette almost as gay a bird in point of plumage as himself. Leaving them, however, to enjoy the comforts of their new situation, we may as well speak a word or two more of the Abbé de Castelneau, having already mentioned his name in this chapter.

After proceeding some way along the streets, which were now nearly vacant, he was met by one of the hawkers crying an account of the execution of that morning, before the unhappy criminals were cold upon the wheel. Numbers of people coming away from the bloody scene then presented themselves; and the abbé—who was, in fact, at this period one of the inhabitants of the Temple, on account of a small debt which he could not pay—turned his steps home, for fear he should be discovered by some officer beyond the limits of his temporary asylum. On entering the dingy chamber which he there inhabited, the woman who took care of those apartments, as well as several others, placed a small paper packet in his hand, at the address of which the abbé looked gravely, while she retired to her usual avocations.

He then turned the packet in order to open it and see the contents. But, the moment his eye rested on the seal, his cheek turned as pale as death, his lips lost their colour, and the packet fell from his trembling hands. He gazed at it for a moment or two as it lay upon the ground, as if it presented some horrible sight to his eyes. But then, with a sudden effort, he stooped down, took it up, tore open the seal, and, to his surprise, beheld two or three of those "*actions de banque*" which were at that period in common circulation through the French metropolis as the chief paper money of the land. The sum thus placed before him was considerable ; but on the top of the notes was a very small piece of paper, folded into the shape of a billet, and sealed with the same seal, the sight of which seemed so much to surprise him. Within the note was written, "Abbé de Castelnau, quit Paris, and never return to it."

There was no signature, and the handwriting was unknown to him ; but the words had a great effect upon his mind, if we may judge by the facts that his debt was immediately paid, and that before sunset on that day he was once more out of Paris, and on his way into the south of France.

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## CHAPTER VIII.

"I WILL tell you," says Rosalind, " who Time ambles withal, who Time trots withal, who Time gallops withal, and who he stands still withal." But the truth is, however, that Time gallops with us all. In the impatience of our boyhood he may seem to go too slow, and in the feebleness of our age he may seem to go too fast ; but, alas ! his pace is very equable, as we all find at last ; and skilful must be that rider whom he does not in the end leave in the mire.

It is an excellent observation of a great poet, that, let a man live as long as he will, the first thirty years of his life will always seem the longest ; and the daily routine of our after years passes like the round of a clock, while the hands on the outside and the movements within mark the passing of time to others without a conscious.

'ness thereof in itself, till the weight has run down and the pendulum stands still.

The place, however, in which time may be made to run the fastest, is in a book, where the author, so long as he is writing it at least, by the magic wand called his pen, reigns supreme, with undisputed sway over everything that is brought within his own particular circle. Even Time himself, the hoary-headed sage whose resistless power neither towers nor temples, thrones nor dynasties, have been able to withstand, is obliged to obey when brought under that rod, and to hurry or slacken his pace according to the writer's will. He may, perhaps, revenge himself upon the readers afterward; but here he is under our dominion; and, accordingly, I command that eighteen years should pass, as if it were but a dream, between the conclusion of the last chapter and the events which I am now about to record. Suppose yourself, gentle reader, to be one of the seven sleepers, and the interval that I now propose to you will seem but as a short nap.

Space, too, I must control as well as time, and lead the mind away from the busy metropolis of France into a distant province, conveying myself and others into the midst of scenes far more congenial to all our feelings than the dull and dusty capital, with its vicious crowds and idle gayeties, where pleasure supplies the place of happiness, and luxury tries to pass itself for contentment.

Eighteen years had elapsed, then, since the execution of the murderers of Gaultier Fiteau. Eighteen years had elapsed since the talent and decision which Pierre Morin had displayed on that occasion had attracted the notice of one who was willing and able to raise him above the station in which we have first depicted him. Eighteen years had passed since the Abbé de Castelneau had adopted, if we may so call it, the child Annette, and had quitted Paris for the second time since he first appeared before the reader.

What were the changes those eighteen years had produced? In the states and empires of Europe, changes immense and extraordinary! The same king, indeed, still sat upon the throne of France, but society itself had undergone a vast alteration, and all the relations of the kingdom with foreign states were different. Enemies had become friends, and friends enemies, and the near-

est of the monarch's kindred were hostilely opposed to his views.

To a narrower circle, however, we must bound our own inquiries. What were the changes those eighteen years had produced in the Abbé de Castelnau, and the child he had so strangely adopted at a moment when, as we have shown, he had but little wealth of any kind even to support himself? In person he remained very much the same as we have already described him. His hair might be somewhat more gray; and certain indescribable appearances might indicate to an attentive eye that Time's wing had flapped more than once over his head since we first presented him to the eye of the reader. He was older in appearance, but yet not much; for at the former period he had looked older than he really was, and at the latter he looked younger.

In his mind there had taken place various changes; and although I do not intend to enter into any minute account of his character, but rather to let it develop itself, yet it may be as well to keep in mind that this is no creation of the fancy, but a living creature of flesh and blood; a being mingled of good and evil which then existed, and which has had many a successor since. It is well to remember also that he was a man of strong passions and feelings, both vicious and virtuous; and that the thing then called philosophy had taken away from him those principles upon which his good feelings might have rested secure, and had only served to teach him to conceal his sensations from others, and very often from himself.

Since he had quitted Paris, however, the better feelings had obtained wider sway: there was not, in short, so much temptation to evil; there were many opportunities of good. He learned to abhor, in new employments and occupations, amusements which he had formerly sought for the exercise of a keen and active mind, and the gratification of an eager and excitable disposition. The gaming-table had been one of his greatest resources, and he had always sought those games in which chance and skill had an equal share, in order that he might stimulate his heart by expectation and anxiety, and exercise his mind by calculation at the same time. There was also a sort of pride and pleasure to him in displaying a certain stoical apathy, which he did not really feel, in regard to the risks and the event of the

game. Since he had quitted Paris, however, he had never touched, or even seen, a card. He had found for himself occupation in the neighbourhood of the small house, not far from the town of Agen, in which he dwelt for ten years; and out of the very limited income that remained to him he had contrived to do great good among the peasantry around. He had quieted dissensions, assisted the poor; had given education to the young, and advice to the old; and, living very frugally himself, he never felt the pressure of need, nor regret at the loss of luxury.

In his own home, however, still remained the sweet child whom he had adopted; and that very fact might be perhaps the great cause—though, beyond doubt, there were many others co-operating—which produced such a change in the habits, if not in the character, of the Abbé de Castelneau. It was not only that she offered sufficient occupation for every spare moment; it was not only that she offered sufficient excitement, and supplied a matter of continual speculation to his philosophy, but it was likewise—at least I believe so—that there is something in the pure and simple innocence of infancy—a fragrance, as it were, fresh from the hand of the great Creator of all spirits—which naturally communicates itself to those who are brought near it, purifying, sanctifying, and blessing, by the sight of that guilelessness which they must love, and the loss of which in their own case they must regret.

This very fact was a matter of speculation to the Abbé de Castelneau himself; and often, when he quitted her, after having amused himself for many an hour with her infant sports and gambols, he would walk forth up the side of the hill, with his eyes bent down upon the ground, looking thoughtful, and, as the peasantry used to fancy, gloomy, but with a chastened joy in his heart which he had never known in scenes of revelry, and pleasure, and indulgence.

“It is strange!” he would murmur to himself, “it is very strange! I feel better, and wiser, and happier, and all from communion with a child!”

Thus passed by the days, to him seeming almost as brief as the sentences in which we have recorded the lapse of those eighteen years. But before much more than one half of those eighteen years had flown, a great change took place in the fortunes of the Abbé de Castel-

neau, and he was suddenly not only restored to as much affluence as he had ever known, but to much greater wealth than he had ever any right to expect. It was not that any of the different benefices which he held, having satisfied the claims of his creditors, were turned to his own use, for it required a longer time than that to pay all the debts that he had contracted ; but, at the end of the ninth year, a report reached him that the son of his uncle, the Count de Castelneau, the only surviving son—for it may be recollect that the elder son had been killed in battle about the period at which this history commences—was dangerously ill.

The tidings seemed to affect him but little, for this young man had been but a mere boy when the ~~last~~ abbé had been admitted within the walls of the chateau of Castelneau. He had loved his elder cousin most sincerely, and had lamented him truly and deeply when he fell by the banks of the Rhine ; but his own conduct had excluded him for many years from the dwelling of his noble relation, and he took no thought or interest in the young heir of that high house.

Soon after, news again reached him that the youth was dead : all he said in the way of mourning was, “Poor boy !” But he added, “Now, were I avaricious, I would go and throw myself at the feet of this old man, profess repentance for all my past errors, and induce him to leave me his rich estates, as well as the old chateau which must be mine, unless, indeed, he marry again and have another heir. But I will do none of these things : he was cruel to his eldest son, harsh to his own unhappy wife, stern and unjust to me, and I will not bend to him. Let him leave his wealth to whom he will, I shall have enough to give a dower to my sweet little Annette, and that will close the account well.”

He went not to see his uncle, nor held any communication with him ; and it may be easily supposed that his uncle took no notice of him. Not long after, however, the Bishop of Toulouse, in passing through that part of the country, took up his abode at the abbé’s house for a day or two, inquiring into various facts concerning the neighbouring districts, in regard to which none could give him such good information as his host. The abbé entertained him with a degree of studied plainness that amused the good prelate, but put him at his ease. There was certainly a slight addition made

to the breakfast, dinner, and supper of the Abbé de Castelneau, but it was in quantity, not in quality, that any change appeared. The bishop was struck, pleased, and amused too with the young Annette, and asked her name one day after she had just quitted the room.

“Annette de St. Morin,” replied the abbé, briefly.

The bishop smiled. “Not your child, I hope, monsieur l’abbé?” said the bishop.

“Yes, my lord!” replied the abbé; but the moment after he added, with a low bow and a cynical look, “my child by adoption and affection, but nothing more.”

The bishop made no reply, but took his leave of the abbé on the following day; and some months passed in the usual course, without any event of importance sufficient to require notice here. At length, however, a courier with a foaming horse stopped at the dwelling of the Abbé de Castelneau, who was at that moment walking down the steps of his house into the little garden that surrounded it. The courier bowed low and presented to him a letter, which the abbé took, and turned to the address with the same calm and unmoved countenance which he now habitually maintained.

On the back of the epistle he read, “To the Abbé, count of Castelneau, Castres, near Agen.” The seal was black, and on opening it he proceeded to read a letter from the curate of the parish in which the chateau of Castelneau was situated, informing him of the death of his relation, and telling him that the late count had left no will, having destroyed, the very day before he died, a will which he had made some time previous.

The abbé thus found himself at once in possession of rank and great wealth; but still he received such intelligence without a change of expression, and merely ordered his simple antiquated chaise—which seemed to have appropriated to itself all the dust that had been raised upon the roads in the vicinity for more than a century—to be brought round, with the two long-tailed mules which had drawn him and his little charge about the neighbourhood of Agen ever since he had quitted Paris.

Everything was made ready in the space of two hours. The abbé got in first, the little girl and Donnine followed, the old man-servant in his gray livery took his place on the outside, and, having hitherto acted the part of gardener as well as lackey, now performed the

office of coachman. The journey occupied more than one day, as any person acquainted with the country may understand, although it must be remembered that the Castelneau of which we speak is not that in the Hérault, but rather that at the distance of some four or five leagues from Cahors, in one of the most picturesque and extraordinary parts of France. There are two or three other places of the same name. Another, belonging to the same family, was to be found near Auch; but it will be remarked, that wherever the name of Castelneau is met with, there will be likewise found a combination of wood, water, and rocky scenery, affording much picturesque beauty, and presenting many a spot where the poet and the painter may rest and dream. The Castelneau, however, near Auch, though it possessed at that time, and perhaps does still, an old castle, was not inhabited by the counts of Castelneau; and the place towards which the abbé bent his steps was that in Querci, not far from Figeac.

Everything was new and delightful to Annette de St. Morin, as the little girl was now called, so that to her at least the journey did not seem a long one. The abbé showed no impatience on his own part; but still he pressed the mules upon their work, as the funeral of the late count was to be delayed till his arrival.

At length he reached the castle of his ancestors; a castle, probably the oldest of the kind in France, of which many parts still stand, as they were raised from the ground, in the dark ages under the Merovingian kings of France. The servants, drawn up in mourning, waited him in the great hall with somewhat of feudal pomp and parade; and, passing through the double line, the abbé went on, without taking notice of any one, till he reached the chamber which had been prepared for him, and in which the curé of the village and the principal notary of Figeac had remained till his arrival.

The funeral was performed with great pomp. The abbé took undisputed possession of the property; and, accompanied by the notary, broke the seals which had been placed upon the various cabinets, and went through the examination of innumerable papers which had belonged to the dead man.

It is always a sad and terrible task—where there is any human feeling left in the heart—that of examining

the papers and letters of those who are gone. The records of fruitless affections, of disappointed hopes, of tenderness perhaps misplaced, perhaps turned by the will of fate to scourge the heart that felt it, are there all before our eyes. Side by side, at one view and in one instant, we have before us the history of a human life and its sad and awful moral; we have there the picture of every bright enjoyment, of every warm domestic blessing; while written by the hand of death beneath them is the terrible truth, "These are all passed away forever, and so will it soon be with thee likewise!"

Whether he felt these things or not, nobody could tell from the countenance of the Abbé, count de Castelneau. He appeared neither more nor less sad after the examination than before. One thing, however, he did find, among the papers of his deceased relation, which called up to his lip that faint and doubtful smile of which we have before had occasion to speak. This was a letter from the Bishop of Castelneau, and dated some few months before the death of the latter. It gave an account of the abbé's own state and character at the time, and represented him as entirely changed and reclaimed from all the vices which at one time had degraded him, living an honourable and useful life, and conferring many benefits on those who surrounded him.

The Abbé de Castelneau sealed the letter up, and labelled it with these words, "My character from my last place;" but he did not doubt, any more than the reader does, that this very character, given to him by the Bishop of Toulouse, had put him in possession of the wealth and estates which were now his. It may be asked if that wealth brought happiness with it: the answer must be, It would appear not. The abbé was not more cheerful, less ~~so even~~: his gravity sunk into gloom: there was a sadness about him which not even the presence of the being he loved best on earth, his own little Annette, as he used to call her, could altogether dissipate.

His personal habits in the mean time remained almost unchanged, though he took the necessary measures to free himself from his obligations to the Church. The whole neighbourhood said, when they heard of this, that the Count de Castelneau would marry for the sake of an heir; that he was a young man, and a handsome man, and one that had loved, but too much, the society of women. It was not likely, therefore, that he would re-

main single ; and everybody anticipated that Annette de St. Morin would soon feel a great difference in the conduct of her father by adoption, for that a new mistress would be speedily given to that household, of which she had been hitherto the pride and delight.

The count, however, did not justify these prognostications. Though he had abandoned the Church, he still retained, in all his garments, the grave hue of its habiliments ; lived with infinite frugality and moderation, and showed a great distaste to that which is commonly called society. The Count de Castelneau might still have retained possession of some of the rents and revenues which he had derived from the Church, although he had freed himself from his vows in all due form, as was but too frequently the case in France at that time. He did not think fit so to do, however, but paid all his debts, and resigned every benefice, abbey, and impropriation which had formed the great bulk of his income before the death of his uncle. In the management of his own property he was liberal and charitable to others, though sparing to himself ; and, had he sought for such honours, might have gained the character of a saint. But of such a distinction he was in no degree ambitious.

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## CHAPTER IX.

HAVING traced the passing of the eighteen years which we have mentioned as far as in their flight they influenced the situation of the Abbé de Castelneau, we must now pause for a short time to inquire into their effect upon another of our characters, though here the subject is infinitely more delicate, and the investigation more obscure.

To examine into the tortuous ways of the human heart—a labyrinth where darkness is added to intricacy—is at the best a most difficult task ; for where shall we find a clew, where a light to guide us, where a voice to tell us at each step whether we are right or wrong ? But to examine into the heart of a woman is a more difficult undertaking ; for the paths are finer and less

distinctly traced, and very, very often even the owner of the place remains wilfully ignorant of all the many turnings and windings of the way. Coarse hands can separate the bundles of coarse twine, but it needs a fine touch to divide the film of the silkworm or to discover the flaws of the diamond. Nevertheless, it is a part of my appointed task to examine the progress, and inquire into the character and feelings, of her whom we must now call, as her father by adoption had called her, Annette de St. Morin.

We left her an infant—a very beautiful infant truly—full of engaging graces and sweet smiles, overflowing with health and good temper. Tears were great strangers in her eyes, even as a child; and, whatever she might carry out of the world or go through therein, she certainly brought into it as great a fund of happy sensations as ever infant was yet endowed with. Human nature is so fond of happiness that it is scarcely possible to help loving any being we see innocently happy. The reverse, indeed, does not hold good, for the deepest and the tenderest interest can be excited by the sight of virtuous grief; but still there is something so engaging in happiness, that few hearts can witness it without being attracted towards those who possess it. Certain it is—whether by the possession of this attractive power, or what other quality I know not—certain it is that Annette de St. Morin, as an infant, engaged the hearts of all those who surrounded her. We have already mentioned the love which she excited in the Abbé de Castelneau: it was the same with the good Donnine, it was the same with the old lackey, and with every other person that approached her. This was the case in infancy; and as time daily more and more developed her graces, and opened new channels for her sunshiny cheerfulness to display itself; as she learned to clap her little hands with joy when anything pleased her, to run from one fond friend to another, and to speak broken words with the sweet tongue of youth, there came melting sensations over hearts that had never melted before, and feelings of tenderness that set all cold philosophy at defiance.

She preserved all the beauties and the graces with which she set out in life till she was about seven years old, and during that period she went through all the ordinary diseases of childhood, showing in moments of

suffering and sickness the same imperturbable and happy calm which we have before mentioned. She might be languid with fever, but she was never querulous or irritable : the lip might be parched and the eye dull, but there was always a smile came up upon the face when her ear caught the sounds of the voices that she loved.

When she was about seven years of age she began to lose the beauty which had distinguished her ; her features grew ill proportioned, her face thin, her form lost the roundness of childhood ; and though her eyes were still fine and her hair beautiful, yet no one who did not examine very closely perceived any promise of after-loveliness. This state of transition continued for several years ; and at the time when she arrived at the chateau of Castelneau, many of the ladies in the vicinity pronounced her an ugly little girl, and, though they looked in vain for any likeness between her and her adopted father, yet argued strongly that she must be his own child, because otherwise he could take no interest in one so devoid of beauty.

There was a change coming, however. Some two years after, the complexion of Annette de St. Morin began to resume the clear rosy brightness which it had in her infancy. Her form grew, not only tall and graceful, but rounded in the most exquisite contour ; gradually, year after year, her features became finer, the whole arrangements of her countenance more harmonious ; her eyes retained their brightness and their lustre ; the lashes that overshadowed them appeared longer, and darker, and softer every day ; and the lips, which had always smiled sweetly, now became full and rosy, with that exquisite bend which is so rarely seen except on the cold pale face of the Grecian statue. The hand and the foot remained small and symmetrical ; and it was remarked that, in whatever way they fell, the lines they formed were all full of grace. Even her hair, which was very luxuriant, though it did not absolutely curl in large masses except when very long, yet had an irrepressible wave which pervaded the whole, and caught the light in glossy gleams wherever the sun fell upon it. In short, she thus changed twice in those eighteen years, from a lovely infant to a plain child, and from a plain child to a most beautiful woman.

Such had been the alterations of her person during the period I have mentioned ; and I have spoken of them

first, as less difficult to deal with than her mind. But that mind went on step by step, developing all its powers under careful nurture. The course of education to which the abbé subjected her was very strange, when his circumstances and situation are considered. It was not the education which one would have expected from a man, a dissipated man, a Frenchman, or a Roman Catholic. In the first place, it was perfectly feminine ; there were none of those harsh studies in it with which men, when intrusted with the education of women, so often unsex them. From the earliest age, he taught her the love of truth and sincerity ; he implanted in her mind that everything was to be sacrificed to that ; he made it, in short, the first principle of her education. But he taught her, too, to be gentle, and docile, and thoughtful for others. He taught her to avoid all that might give pain ; but what may seem stranger than all is, that he taught her these things all from one source—the Book of our salvation.

In the course of so teaching her, he suffered the cause of his anxiety to fill her mind with the words of that book to appear on one or two occasions. The first time that he did so was when she was about ten years old, and he found that something which she met with in the history of the Saviour was too difficult for her to comprehend.

“ My dear child,” said the abbé, “ you cannot understand it, and I do not expect you to do so ; but I am giving these treasures to your heart, and not to your mind : your mind will share in them hereafter. I wish them to be part of your feelings, part of your existence, the dowry of your spirit. I tell you, Annette, that I would give willingly this right hand to have received these words in youth through the heart, rather than in manhood through the understanding. For oh ! my sweet girl, after that heart has been hardened by the fierce fire of the world, *we may be convinced without faith, and believe without feeling.*”

Upon this principle it was evident that he acted : but there was nothing in the least ascetic in his teaching, for it was all redolent of that joy and cheerfulness which breathes from the volume that he opened to her. In short, he told her to be happy, and he taught her how.

He added, moreover, everything that could give her the graces of society, and the highest accomplishments

that could be obtained. He thought none of these things frivolous and light when they did not interfere with higher things ; and he believed, nay, he knew, that they might go hand in hand with the holiest thoughts. He showed her that every talent and endowment possessed by man, whether corporeal or mental, is the gift of God, and that it is one part of the worship of God to cultivate and employ those talents by every means that he has placed within our power. "God has forbidden excess," he said, "in anything ; and he himself has told us those things which in themselves are evil. Thus it would be an impious arraignment of his providence to say that any of those things which he has given, and not forbidden, may not be used in moderation. The lark," he said, "my child, sings at the gate of heaven. Sing you also in the happiness of your heart ; and in so singing, remember the God who made sweet sounds, and who taught man to harmonize them, and to give a finer voice to all the emotions of his mind. The finger of God, too," he said, "is in all the beautiful things of the world ; and when, with the pencil, your hand traces them, my Annette, you will not forget the hand that formed them. Every enjoyment that is innocent and moderate we may believe was given us expressly from above ; and the test by which you should try your enjoyments is by the prayer that you can repeat after them.) If, after any pleasure, you can raise your voice to the Almighty with an attentive and unwavering mind, you may feel sure that your enjoyment has been moderate. If, with a knowledge of his word, you can ask him to bless you in such things, you may be sure that your enjoyment has been good."

Such were the doctrines that he taught, and such were the principles upon which he acted towards his adopted child. It may be said this was a much better and more amiable man than he has been represented in the beginning ; but such is not the case. I have said that his character was mingled of good and evil ; but his love for that child separated the good from the evil, and he gave all the better part to her.

Every advantage that any of the neighbouring towns could afford was procured for Annette with the most boundless generosity by the abbé after he became Count de Castelneau. Every skilful master that could be heard of was called to the chateau to give her instruction in

turn ; and in the hours which were devoted to reading, the abbé, who was a man of refined taste, made her acquainted with all that was beautiful in the first writers in his own and other countries. One thing, however, he excluded entirely, which was that class of composition which was then generally called philosophy. He said that a man who had once drunk of a cup of poison, and had suffered from the consequences all his life, would never hold the same to the lips of one he loved.

Conducted in this manner, we may easily conceive what was the effect of education upon a mind naturally full of high qualities, and endowed with very great abilities of all kinds. But there was one particular circumstance which affected, in a marked and peculiar manner, the character of Annette de St. Morin. This was the state of comparative seclusion in which she lived. The Count de Castelneau courted not society ; and, indeed, during a great part of the year there was little to be found in the neighbourhood of the chateau. The metropolis, so to speak, had swallowed up, like a great gulf, the nobility of France ; and few, if any of the members of that body spent more than a month or two on their own estates. When they did appear in the country, they came with all the vices of a great city hot and flagrant about them, and, consequently, they were not very desirable companions either for the count or his young charge. He took care, however, that the tone of her manners should be high and refined. She had the politeness of nature from gentleness of thought, and all those graces of demeanour which cultivation and refinement of mind can alone afford. But still there was a difference between herself and the general world of Paris. It was difficult to discern in what that difference lay, and yet it was very striking. It was, in truth, that she thought for herself, and did not think only as others thought. Of course, in very many respects, her thoughts were, in substance, the same as other people's ; but they suggested themselves in different forms from those of other people, and they continually presented modes and expressions different from those which other persons would have used.

The society which she did mingle with in the neighbourhood consisted of a few of the old and respectable families of the province, in some of whom poverty, and in some of whom pride, counteracted the attractions of

the capital and retained them in the country, where small means afforded all that was necessary, and where old blood and renowned ancestry were sufficient to ensure distinction. In Paris such was not the case ; there even great wealth sunk down to competence ; and old family and great renown were only regarded as small adjuncts to other more attractive qualities, and as nothing without them.

From time to time, too, the count visited the town of Cahors, and took Annette de St. Morin with him ; and on those occasions—generally some public event—the royal officers of the province, and most of the other nobles, even from considerable distances, visited the town, and brought their families to grace the meeting.

Thus Annette de St. Morin was not without a thorough knowledge of all the forms and manners of the world, and was fitted in every respect to mingle gracefully with it, and to play her part even with distinction. Still, however, the greater part of her time was passed nearly in solitude ; for at the chateau of Castelneau a visit was a rare occurrence, and to dine or sup out in the neighbourhood was an event to be recorded in the history of the year. The count, it is true, during the early part of her life, devoted all the morning to teach and educate her ; but after the hour of noon he spent a considerable portion of the day alone, and Annette was left to wander through the neighbouring country and about the grounds of the chateau as she thought fit.

Every one who has visited that part of France must know that the vicinity of Castelneau is very beautiful, and the very fact of its loveliness had a considerable effect upon her mind. There can be no doubt that upon the impressions which we receive in youth through any of the senses depend, in a great degree, the tastes, if not the feelings, which form our happiness or unhappiness in after years. Those impressions sink more deeply into our hearts than any others we ever receive. They are, as it were, the mould from which the clay takes its form while it is yet soft and unhardened by the fire of the world ; and thus it was that Annette de St. Morin derived from the scenes in which she was accustomed to move peculiar habits of feeling, which affected the whole course of her thoughts. Those thoughts were, if one may so term it, picturesque. She loved all that was beautiful, and great, and good ;

but there was a kind of enthusiastic eagerness in all she did, which was certainly derived from the grandeur and wildness of the scenery which surrounded her in her early years.

Annette's mind was not one that dwelt much upon herself. She knew that she was beautiful; for it is scarcely possible to conceive a situation in which that knowledge can be excluded from a woman's heart, without gross and shameful falsehood on the part of those who surround her; but she knew not how beautiful, nor was she vain for a quality which she estimated at its due value and no more. She thought little of it, in short; and her mind scarcely rested for a moment at a time upon a gift which she felt was shared by every flower and every bird. It was natural that—not living among people with whom such things were of much consequence, whom beauty did not attract, and whom plainness would not have repelled—it was natural that she should not attach to personal advantages that unreal worth which a vain world in general accords to it. She knew not that vice and folly would often be sought and followed for the sake of beauty, where virtue and wisdom would attract no attention or respect. I have said she knew not, but I should have said she comprehended not; for she had read and heard that it was so, and, perhaps, gave mere assent to the tale without bringing the thing home to her own heart, for there is a great difference between those three acts, knowing, and comprehending, and feeling. Of course, though she might have knowledge, she had no experience; and though she had principles to guide her own conduct, she had no data to judge of that of others. Her father by adoption had indeed taken pains to give her some insight into the world's ways, yet she had learned the facts but as a lesson, without any practical application thereof. She often, indeed, was tempted into wild and vague speculations as to what that great world really was which she heard so frequently talked of; and as she walked by the banks of any of the manifold rivers of that land of streams and fountains, she would gaze thoughtfully upon the waters, wishing that, like them, her mind might flow on through all the thousand scenes of bright nature and glad human life which decorated their banks, and see that busy world of action and endeavour which each town along their course was sure to display. She

would picture to herself all that might then meet her eye, and the many matters of deep interest and curiosity which might be opened to her sight. But then, again, a voice seemed to whisper from within, that those waters could not pass amid the scenes of man's existence without their brightness being troubled by impurity, till at length they would reach their conclusion in a turbid and a darksome stream ; that never could they turn back upon their course, but must go onward forever, bearing with them every burden that was cast upon them, and every fouler stream that was poured in upon their once pure bosom. She shuddered as she thus thought, and the brief curiosity in which she had indulged passed away like a dream.

This was not the only speculation, however, with which she amused herself, for knowledge without experience is ever visionary ; but as she walked in solitude through the woods and upon the hills in the neighbourhood of Castelneau during those hours which the count spent alone in the chateau, thousands of bright fancies would rise before her eyes, imaginations that would have become hopes if they had had any tangible object to fix upon. She would ask herself the meaning of the gay lark's song ; she would give a voice to the whispering of the wind ; the flowers would wake into life under her eyes, and act their parts in dramas of her own creation. These things grew upon her in her sixteenth, seventeenth, and her eighteenth year ; but a time was rapidly coming when visions were to give place to realities, and her heart was taught to speak instead of her imagination.

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## CHAPTER X.

THE chateau of Castelneau still presents towers, and ramparts, and bastions of great antiquity, or at least it did so twenty years ago ; but, at the more remote period of which I speak, the building was in full preservation, and in external form retained all the peculiarities of the age in which it was built, though the interior had been modernized and fitted up with the luxurious ex-

travagance of the reign of Louis XV. Within the walls of the chateau were no less than three large courts, separated from each other by massy piles of building, containing long and rambling corridors and extensive halls, with innumerable smaller chambers scattered here and there, with much space wasted, but with no small economy of light. Besides these masses of building, and the vast circuit of walls and towers that surrounded them and united them together, were several large square edifices, detached from the rest of the castle, or only united to it either by a sort of covered bridge high up in the air, or a passage cut through the rock beneath, and issuing forth from those apartiments which, in the modern arrangements that had been made in the castle, were appropriated to butlers, cooks, and serving-men. Though the molelike process of proceeding under the earth gives an idea of mystery and darkness to our minds in the present day, when we are all together what may be called an up-stairs world, yet to the servants of the chateau of Castelneau the matter had become so familiar, that they passed through a subterranean passage, which would have furnished the highest enjoyment to one of the votaries of Udolpho, as calmly and coolly as we go from one ordinary room to another. Notwithstanding the antiquity of the chateau itself, by some extraordinary forgetfulness on the part of its inhabitants, it was unprovided even with a ghost. The eastern tower itself possessed some of the most cheerful apartments in the whole building; and that face of the chateau which looked towards the south contained several of the most gay and smiling halls that the arts of any period could have devised, with deep oriel windows, in the recesses of which the sunshine loved to linger and draw patterns on the oaken floor. In short, many parts of the castle afforded as bright and pleasant a habitation as it was possible for man to desire; and the number of servants and retainers usually kept up therein filled it so full of human life, that everything like the appearance of solitude was banished from its precincts.

The neighbourhood, indeed, though the land is most warm and sunny, had somewhat of the wild and the sublime in its general aspect. It retains, more than any other part of France that I have visited, that feudal colouring, if I may so term it, which leads the mind back at once to early and more simple times. There are

manifold woods and streams, wide forests, deep valleys, fountains innumerable. Nor are these last alone the sources of small rills, that spring in a jet of silver from the bank, and flow on, soon losing themselves in some greater body of water; but in some parts of that district rivers burst at once from the green turf in the midst of the forest, issuing from a depth that no one as yet has been able to fathom. The houses of the peasantry, however lowly, have a neatness about them which speaks of natural taste: there is a love of flowers, and a fondness for bright but harmonious colours, which smacks of a peculiar sort of poetry of the mind; and the very jargon of the peasantry is sweet and softened, however incorrect, giving proof of an ear highly sensible to musical sounds. Here, indeed, was spoken, in former times, in great purity, the soft *Langue d'Oc*, undoubtedly one of the most harmonious tongues of modern Europe; and there is a charm in that harmony of language, in its connexion with the imagination, at which reason and philosophy is sometimes indignant. Many a very sensible and clever man has puzzled himself to divine how it is that the songs of the *Troubadours*, though very much inferior in reason and in wit to the compositions of their more northern neighbours, the *Trouveres*, have obtained a much higher reputation, and still retain their hold upon the public mind. There may be many causes for this fact, but one of those causes undoubtedly is the superior harmony of the *Langue d'Oc* over the *Langue d'Oil*.

However that may be, everything around Figeac and its neighbourhood spoke not alone of the early days of the good olden time, but of early days in their brightest aspect, early days in their sunshine and calmness; for, alas! those early feudal days had also their clouds and their storms. The people of the district were not numerous, but food was plenty among them, and therefore they might well be contented; for although plenty will not always produce content, yet very seldom, if ever, is content found without it. Neither was the population very thin: there were few moors or wastes of any kind, though the woodlands were extensive; but those woodlands, it must be recollectcd, were among the richest districts of the province. In the skirts of the forests, however, as well as in other places, were numerous villages and hamlets, and often in the heart of the wood itself

appeared a neat cottage, always placed in the best and most picturesque situation on the top of some high bank or on the slope of some gentle hill, where the advantages of air, and shelter, and dryness were all combined. No bad indication of the character of the peasantry of any particular country is to be found in the situation of the hamlets and cottages ; and in these respects the positions chosen by the people in that neighbourhood harmonized well with their ordinary tastes and feelings.

The soil in general was dry and wholesome, and that part which was given up to the production of timber was generally the broken ground which it would have been difficult to reduce to form and shape by any effort of the ploughshare. No regularity had prevailed in the art of planting during those remote centuries when the seeds of the oaks and beeches that grew around Castelnau were sown—if indeed the woods themselves were not remnants of the old primeval forests which once covered the whole face of the country—and thus the greatest picturesque beauty was to be found in the forest ground. The rest of the land, it is true, was beautiful also ; but often from the edges of the wood were to be seen bright glimpses of the open country, mingling with the fringe of green trees that skirted the hills, and combining many sorts of natural beauty in one. The climate, too, in that part of France, is peculiarly fine ; and although so many rivers and springs appear in every direction, very little rain falls, and the heavy clouds that sometimes gather round float slowly past to higher regions, and pour their showers upon the tops of distant mountains. It thus becomes a land of gleams, where the sunshine and the shadow seem constantly playing with each other, and running bright races over the green hillsides.

Among such scenes were passed the years of Annette de St. Morin, from the time she was ten years of age till the time she was eighteen ; and, as I have stated before, those gleams, and woods, and hills, and valleys, and bright streams, had no unimportant part in her education. They fixed her tastes, and even in some degree formed her character.

Few of the chateaux in the neighbourhood of that of Castelnau were inhabited. Many were in ruins ; and the two nearest houses which dignified themselves with such a title, and were yet tenanted by anything better

than bats and owls, lay at the distance of more than five miles from it and from each other. One of these was situated not far from the banks of the Lot, and was in every respect very different from the chateau of Castelnau. It had been built by a marquis in the latter part of the reign of Louis XIV., and had been embellished by his successor under the regency. The genealogical tree of the family was said not to be one of the tallest in the forest, though the branches had become very numerous of late years; nor were the roots supposed to be very pure—at least no one had ever clearly ascertained into what soil they shot. The chateau itself was exactly what might be expected from the age in which it was built and the person who built it. It was all glass within and without. The windows were like what are termed goggle eyes—much too large, in short, for the size of the place. There were also a great number too many for the small masses of masonry that supported them; and, to make these masses look the more flimsy, the skilful artist had not contented himself till he had covered them with plaster panels and arabesques. Tall stone pinnacles and balls covered the tops of each of the piers; a whole host of Cupids had been squandered upon different parts of the stonework, and innumerable baskets of flowers afforded the little god of love something to do. The house was seated upon a raised platform, and every means was employed, by manifold flights of shallow steps, to weary the visiter in approaching the dwelling of the Marquis de Cajare.

The interior resembled the outside in ornament and decoration. There was not a panel without some painting upon it, not in the best taste in the world; and the ceilings and staircases were filled with Neptunes and Apollos, Cupids and Venuses, Tritons and Nereids. Manifold looking-glasses ornamented the walls, and the columns that supported the ceilings were fluted with blue glass. In the winter-time the house would have been intolerably cold; but it was only during about three months in the very height of summer that the marquis and the marquise, after having talked to everybody in Paris of their chateau on the Lot, came down, with a select few of their acquaintances, to languish through the space allotted to a dull country life.

The family of the marquis consisted of himself and his wife, one son and one daughter. The latter was

somewhat older than Annette de St. Morin ; handsome, too, and not without a certain degree of cleverness, but full of frivolity, conceit, and pretension. She had thus all the qualities requisite to attract the admiration of the youth of Paris ; and people were beginning to marvel that Mademoiselle de Cajare, now approaching her twentieth year, had not formed some splendid alliance. However, things in general were managed in Paris at that time in a very different manner from the arrangements of the present day. The young lady had little or nothing to do in the affair but to submit, and all the other particulars were arranged between her parents and the person to be coupled to herself for life, or, more often still, between them and his parents. This, indeed, was not always the case ; for there never yet was a time, either in France or any other country, in which love-matches were not occasionally made, as is shown by the very distinction drawn in the language between the *mariage d'amour* and the *mariage de convenance*.

It may be supposed, then, that in the society in which Mademoiselle de Cajare moved, the *mariage de convenance* was much more customary than any other sort of alliance ; and it began to be rumoured in the circles of Paris that the marquis himself had not been so explicit in naming the dowry of his daughter as was desirable to the young gallants of the capital. Yet he lived in the highest and most profuse style ; and his son, who was serving with the army on the Rhine, never found any want of means to gratify whatever whim or caprice might come into the head of a spoiled child of fortune.

The marquis himself was everything that had been the pink of perfection some thirty years before. He was, consequently, somewhat out of date, according to the manners of the day ; and his graces had a degree of stiffness which occasionally excited the merriment of the *dégagée* youth which filled the saloons of the metropolis. The marquise was what the people of her own time called a sweet, interesting woman, as heartless as it was possible to conceive, and, of course, as selfish. She had a certain sort of common sense, or rather, I should say, discernment about her, which made her perceive, when she first set out in life, some six or seven-and-twenty years before, that, as she had not enough ready wit to be *piquante*, she must assume the interesting and sentimental ; and this having be-

come her habitual style, she continued to languish and to sigh, and to look tender and beseeching, till all her charms began perceptibly to pass away, and the necessity of giving them a little heightening became more and more apparent every day. She took the hint which her looking-glass afforded; superinduced additional portions of red or white in various places, as the case required; arranged the eyebrows with the nicest care, and added a lock here and there among her hair, where "Time, who steals our years away," had stolen her tresses too.

Such was one of the chateaux in the neighbourhood of Castelneau, and such was the family to which it belonged. There was another, however, at about the same distance in a different direction. It was situated in that higher, if not more mountainous, district about Fons and St. Medard, and was as much the reverse of the chateau of Cajare in its site and appearance as in the character of its inhabitants. In the jargon of the country it was called Castel Nogent, and the name of the gentleman who inhabited it was the Baron de Nogent. He was at this time an old man, but older indeed in appearance than in reality, for Care had had its hand upon him as well as Time. His hair was as white as snow, and his figure, which had once been tall and powerful, was now thin and somewhat bent. He was not, however, more than sixty years of age; and his countenance, though worn and somewhat pale, bore a noble and lofty look; but, withal, there was an expression of melancholy, nay, of almost hopelessness about it, which was permanent, mingling with every other expression—even with a smile.

The chateau was one of the old dwelling-houses of the country, not of so antique a date, indeed, as that of Castelneau, but still carrying its origin back for many centuries, and built upon the foundations of an older mansion, all record of the erection of which was lost in the lapse of time. It was not nearly so large as the chateau of Castelneau, and, indeed, never had been, but still it was a large building, and would have afforded ample accommodation for a numerous family and a splendid train. By such, however, it was not tenanted; for the baron himself had seen his wife—whom he had wedded from pure affection, and had never ceased to love—wither away ere she had been his more than four years, leaving him not exactly alone, for he had one

son, but solitary in heart, and depressed by manifold misfortunes. The train of the baron, too, was very small ; for his father had made great sacrifices for his king and for his country, and had, of course, met with neither reward nor remuneration. The baron also had suffered severe losses of property from accidental causes ; and the chateau, not being half filled, was falling in some parts into decay.

The scenery round it was very beautiful, full of woods, and rocks, and streams ; and, in a part which had been formerly reserved as a hunting park for the chateau itself, rose one of the heads of the small river Cere, rushing at once from a deep basin in the rock in a jet of nearly four feet in diameter.

The Abbé de Castelneau, as soon as he assumed the title of count, and took possession of the castles and estates, was immediately visited in great state by all the gentry of the neighbourhood, with the exception of the Baron of Nogent. With grave and deliberate slowness he returned those visits, affording no great encouragement either by his words or manner to any attempt at intimacy. He waited for some time for the baron's call ; but, as that nobleman did not appear, he proceeded in his old postchaise, drawn by the two mules, for which he retained an unwavering regard, to visit his solitary neighbour. The baron received him without any appearance of discomfort or surprise, but also without any show of pleasure.

"Monsieur de Nogent," said the count, "we of Castelneau and you of Nogent have been friends for two hundred years, and perhaps longer ; I see not why it should not be so still."

"There is but one reason, count," replied the baron ; "the house of Castelneau is rich, the house of Nogent is poor, and they meet not upon the same terms as in other days."

"If riches could make any difference in regard, sir," replied the count, "friendship would be a thing not worth the trouble of coming two leagues from Castelneau to seek. I have shown you that I value it more highly than you seem to do : if you do not really hold it lightly, you will come to Castelneau in return."

The baron smiled faintly. "I do not hold it lightly, indeed," he replied ; "and, since such are your feelings, Monsieur de Castelneau, I will, of course, return your

visit with pleasure. But I have so long avoided all society, from causes too painful for me to enter into, that I fear you will find but a dull and cheerless neighbour, though not from estimating friendship at a low rate, or undervaluing high abilities when I meet with them."

Some farther conversation took place, and the count inquired after the baron's son, whom he remembered a beautiful boy some ten or twelve years before.

"He is now," replied the baron, "one of the king's pages, and I hope, ere another year be over, to hear that he is serving his country in the field."

The count wished the young gentleman success; and, after remaining a reasonable time, in order to suffer all strangeness to wear off, he took his leave, and returned to the chateau of Castelneau. His visit called forth another immediately from the baron, who spoke and acted with less reserve than he had previously done, and mentioned his intention of proceeding very soon to Paris, in order to see his son equipped for the army.

Not long after, the Count de Castelneau proceeded to the town of Cahors for some time, to settle various matters of business connected with the inheritance which had just fallen to him. He took Annette with him; and, on their return, he found that the Baron de Nogent and his son had called during their absence. He immediately returned their visit without a moment's loss of time; but he found the old nobleman now alone, his son having returned to Paris in order to join the army.

From that time forth the years slipped by without any incident of importance checkering the intercourse between the Baron de Nogent and the Count de Castelneau. They met sometimes twice, sometimes three times in the course of each year, but not oftener; and towards the latter end of the eighteen years of which we have lately been speaking, when the baron visited the chateau of Castelneau, his eyes would frequently rest for a moment or two upon the beautiful countenance of Annette de St. Morin with a look of thoughtful inquiry, as if something puzzled him and set his mind busily to work.

## CHAPTER XI.

As each human heart is a world in itself, and we have in this book more than one heart to deal with, it would take a whole constellation of such books to describe, with any degree of minuteness and precision, all the different points and particulars of the characters we have had under review, and the changes which took place therein in the space of the eighteen years so frequently referred to. We have done our best, however, in a short space, to give some idea of the characters of the Count of Castelneau and his adopted child Annette de St. Morin, together with a general view of the circumstances which surrounded them ; and, however imperfectly all this may have been accomplished, it is time that we should proceed to make the personages speak and act for themselves.

We have told the generous reader, who is quite willing to believe that everything we do tell him is true, that during the three or four hours in the middle of the day which the Count de Castelneau thought fit to spend alone in solitary thought, Mademoiselle de St. Morin would wander forth through the bright scenery in the neighbourhood. During these excursions she was sometimes on horseback, followed by numerous attendants—for, although the count was so simple in all his own habits, he never suffered her to want any of the outward appearances of rank and high station—but often on foot, and then generally unaccompanied. She was fond of indulging her own thoughts ; and, though sometimes the sunny side of the breezy hill would fill her with high spirits, and tempt her to gallop her fleet Limousin jennet for many a mile over the broken turf, yet, towards eighteen years of age, she generally returned ere long to the more thoughtful mood, and whiled away the hours with fancies of her own. It may be asked, what were those fancies ? I cannot tell, nor could she herself have told. All the small particulars that she knew of the world, and of nature, and of her own heart, danced in the light of a happy mind like motes in a ray of sunshine. Each glittered as it passed through the beam, disappear-

ed, and was forgotten ; but others still succeeded, and all derived brilliance from the cheerful ray through which they floated, so long as they were within its influence.

There might be, at those times, within that young bosom the wish to be beloved by some kindred spirit, filled with bright thoughts and high aspirations like her own. Such things might well and naturally be in her heart ; for it had been a principle of him who had taught her all which she knew, to set her the example of that truth which he required from her, and to deceive her in nothing. He strove, to the very best of his power, to give to all things their right estimate ; and he sought not in any degree to conceal from her that love was before her as an inevitable part of her destiny, a thing that was to form an epoch in her existence, though not to absorb within itself the thoughts and feelings of her life. He guarded her mind from dwelling upon that idea, it is true, by supplying her with plenty of other matter for thought ; but still youth, and nature, and all those sweet and bright, but vague and shadowy, hopes, which form the atmosphere of love, might well have a place within her breast.

She was thus one day wandering on, at the distance of a few miles from the chateau of Castelneau, when, feeling somewhat weary with the warmth of a bright day in the end of May, she sat down to rest on a cushion of green moss that rose round the silvery roots of a tall beech-tree in the woods. At the distance of perhaps twenty yards from where she sat was a small, narrow, sandy road, leading through the woods from Maridal to Figeac, and flowing along, on the other side of the road, was a bright clear stream, which a few miles farther on plunged into the Lot. The beech-tree was one of peculiar beauty, with long bending arms dropping over the ground below, as if to canopy that mossy cushion from the sun ; and up behind again sloped far away the green bank, studded here and there with old trees, casting deep shadows round them, but leaving bright gleams of sunshine upon the more open expanse of forest turf. On the right, about twenty yards from the spot where Annette sat, and at the same distance from the road, was an old Gothic cross with a Latin inscription upon it, and at its foot appeared a fountain in a stone basin, richly ornamented by some hand which had long been dust.

I have dwelt on the description of this scene for many reasons, but for none more than because in it occurred

more than one event affecting the happiness of Annette de St. Morin. Thus often does it happen in the strange, mysterious existence of man, that certain spots seem to have a fate attached to them, sometimes as the scenes of those greater events that affect nations and worlds, sometimes only as the places where occurrences, marking the particular destiny of individuals, happen from time to time. How many a field of battle has seen various contending armies pass over them at far remote periods ; how many houses and palaces contain within them the record of many a great and terrible event. How often does it happen to us individually, that on the same spot where the course of our existence has once been changed by some of the great marking occurrences of life, we have again and again met with change of fortune for good or for evil.

Annette de St. Morin sat there and mused ; and if anything at that time in the whole expanse of her sunny mind could bear the name of gloom, we might say that she was more melancholy than usual. The subject of her thoughts was serious. As she looked at the bright stream that flowed by her, it presented to her mind, as the rippling course of a river has naturally done to almost every one when gazing on it intently, an image of human life ; and the bright waters, as they flowed by her, seemed to carry on her thoughts into the future. What was to be her own fate and destiny ? she asked herself ; where the dark and unseen end of that existence, which now passed as brightly and peacefully as the sparkling waters before her eyes ? Then again her mind turned to the past ; and, like one gazing up towards the top of a mountain, she could trace, step by step, the way back towards infancy, where gradually all minute objects were blended together, and the eyes of memory rested at last upon a faint blue point scarcely distinguishable from the sky.

As she was thus thinking, perhaps asking her own heart who were her parents, what her fate by birth, and what her previous history, the noise of wheels, and the voice of a driver encouraging his horses, were heard at some little distance in the wood. Those sounds roused Annette from her reverie, but did not in any degree scare or alarm her. All was so peaceful in the country-round—violence and wrong were so seldom heard of in that district, that she entertained no apprehension of

any kind, and only drawing the veil which was over her head somewhat more closely round her face, she sat still while the carriage came slowly forward, watching it with some degree of interest as it approached.

It was a plain but handsome vehicle, according to the fashion of that day, with tall flat sides and a moulding at the top ; and it was drawn, as was then customary, by four horses, driven by one coachman ; but, what was somewhat strange for a vehicle of that kind, no lackey appeared, either beside the driver or at the back of the carriage. The sandiness of the road seemed the cause of the slowness of its progress, for the vehicle was weighty, and the wheels sunk deep in the soft ground. The horses, however, were strong, and appeared quite able to draw it to the firmer road which lay about a mile farther on ; but, just as the carriage was passing the spot where Annette sat, a gentleman put his head out of the window, and bade the coachman stop and let the horses rest awhile.

The driver immediately obeyed and dismounted from his box, and the gentleman who had spoken opened the door of the carriage and got out. Had he been a young man, or a man of a gay aspect, Annette de St. Morin might have felt inclined to rise and wend her way homeward ; but such was not at all the case, and she remained quietly seated where she was, thinking that in a minute or two the vehicle would move on.

The gentleman who had descended from the carriage seemed to be between forty and fifty years of age, but nearer to the latter than to the former period : he was tall, well proportioned, and graceful, but his hair, which had once been very dark, was thickly mingled with gray. His countenance was good, and not gloomy, though thoughtful ; and his dress, which was black, was of the best materials, and made in the best fashion. As soon as he had set his foot to the ground, he offered his hand to a lady who was within, and who likewise descended from the vehicle. She was considerably younger than himself, apparently about five or six-and-thirty years of age, and, as Annette's eyes rested upon her, she thought that she had never beheld a more interesting being. She was still very beautiful, though the first graces of youth were past ; and there was an expression of sadness on her countenance, which, though it could not exactly be said to harmonize with the style of her features,

was perhaps the more touching from appearing on a face well calculated to express gay and joyous lightness of heart.

The lady spoke a few words to the gentleman beside her, which Annette did not hear, and the eyes of both fixed for a moment upon Mademoiselle de St. Morin. As they saw, however, that she averted her face and made a movement as if to rise and depart, they both turned towards the fountain and the cross, and the lady knelt before the latter, and appeared to repeat a prayer. The gentleman had turned round twice to look at Annette, and, in the mean time, a second lady, extremely well dressed, but by no means bearing the distinguished air of the other, had come forth from the carriage, and was gazing likewise at the fair girl who was seated on the bank.

This double scrutiny somewhat discomposed Mademoiselle de St. Morin, and she now rose for the purpose of returning to the chateau; but at that moment the gentleman approached her with rapid steps, and bowing low, with an uncovered head, he said, "I beg a thousand pardons for interrupting you; but allow me to ask if, in passing along this road, we do not go very near to the fine old chateau of Castelneau."

There was something so respectful and courteous in the gentleman's tone, that if Annette had felt anything like annoyance at being gazed at, it passed away immediately, and she replied with a smile, "You go directly before the gates on the way to Figeac. In fact, you can go no other way."

"Can you tell me," continued the gentleman, looking back to the lady who had now finished her prayer and was approaching, "Can you tell me if strangers may be permitted to see the interior of it without disturbing the family, which I believe is numerous?"

"Nay, you are mistaken," answered Annette; "the family is anything but numerous, consisting only of the count and Mademoiselle de St. Morin."

"Mademoiselle de St. Morin," said the gentleman again, "is, I think—"

"A ward of the Count de Castelneau," replied Annette; "but I must not let you go on farther," she added: "I am Annette de St. Morin."

The lady who had been kneeling before the cross had, during the latter part of this brief dialogue, come close

to the speakers ; and Annette, though looking principally towards the person who addressed her, had remarked a strange degree of agitation in his female companion. She was not a little surprised and confounded, however, when, at the words she had last spoken, the lady, giving way to some internal emotion, which seemed suddenly to overpower all her efforts to resist it, cast herself upon Annette's neck, and, kissing her again and again, mingled her caresses with many tears, in which joy and sorrow had both evidently a part.

In vain the gentleman who accompanied her laid his hand upon her arm, saying, "Remember, oh, remember!" and the other lady coming up, exclaimed, "Have a care, dear madam, have a care." The lady's emotions were evidently not to be restrained ; and she wept upon Annette's bosom, sobbing as if her heart would break, and from time to time pressing her lips upon her cheek and upon her brow. Then again she would dash the drops from her eyes, and gaze in the young lady's face, and then would burst into tears, and lean her head upon her shoulder. On her part, as may well be supposed, Annette was agitated as well as surprised. She knew not, she could not divine, what was the cause of the emotion that she beheld ; but yet there was something in that lady's look, and tone, and manner, which wakened strange feelings in her heart ; feelings of tenderness, and interest, and affection, which she could not account for ; and, greatly moved herself, all she could say was, "What is it ? Pray tell me, what is it ? What is the meaning of all this ?"

Nobody answered her for some time ; while the gentleman whispered a few words from time to time to the lady, who was thus strangely agitated, and endeavoured gently to draw her away. At length, however, he said, in reply to Annette's repeated question, "You are very like this lady's daughter, mademoiselle, whose name was Annette also, so that the sight of you and the sound of that name have troubled her a little. She seems to forget, for the time, that you are not the young lady she lost. She will be better in a moment or two, and then will be sorry for having agitated you."

Annette looked at the lady's dress ; and though that of the gentleman might certainly pass for mourning, his fair companion was habited in all the bright and delicate colours which were then fashionable in the Parisian

world. There was not much time, however, for observation, for the lady now seemed to recover herself; and, gazing upon Annette with a look of sad but deep interest, she said, in a tone of greater composure, "I beg your pardon, young lady, I fear I have agitated you. You look like one that is very happy, and I pray to God that you may never know unhappiness."

"I am very happy," replied Annette, "and I can scarcely foresee anything that should make me unhappy, for I have the kindest and best of guardians, who leaves nothing undone to ensure my present and my future happiness."

"Is he kind to you?" exclaimed the lady, eagerly. "Is he kind to you? Then may God of Heaven bless him! may Heaven bless," she added, more composedly, "every one who is kind to those who are placed under their charge!"

As she thus spoke, the gentleman again whispered something to her, and seemed to urge her eagerly, for she replied at length, "Well, well, I will come; but remember, it is but a moment out of a life;" and again turning to Annette, she added, "Forgive me, sweet girl, if I have frightened and agitated you: we shall meet again, I trust, some time, even in this world, so pray remember me."

"I will, indeed, dear lady," replied Annette; "but by what name can I remember you?"

The gentleman held up his finger to her, as if to beg her to ask no questions; and the lady, after gazing in her face earnestly, once more embraced her, kissing her cheek again and again. Then turning away with bitter tears, she re-entered the carriage, merely murmuring the words "Adieu, adieu!" The other lady then kissed Annette's cheek likewise, saying in a low tone, "You may some day know more;" and the gentleman, returning from the side of the carriage, bade her adieu respectfully ere he withdrew.

When he had handed in the last of the two ladies, Annette was not a little surprised to hear him turn to the coachman and say, as if he were thoroughly acquainted with every step of the country round, "As soon as you have passed the castle gates, take the second broad road to the left, and go on as fast as you can till you reach the town of Maur."

Thus saying, he sprang into the vehicle, shut the door

behind him, and the coachman driving on, the whole party were soon out of sight. Annette walked slowly back to the chateau, to tell the Count of Castelneau what had occurred; but, to her surprise, she found that, contrary to his usual habits, he had gone out on horseback in the middle of the day, and had not even said when he would return.

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## CHAPTER XII.

It was many hours before the count returned to the chateau; when he did so, he entered the room where Annette was sitting with his usual calm and sedate step, and with a brow on which it was scarcely possible to perceive that there was any emotion, either angry, sorrowful, or joyous. As much as he ever smiled, he smiled on greeting the child of his adoption; but, as soon as he had seated himself, he despatched the servant who threw open the door of the saloon for him to summon the porter of the great gates to his presence. The count had passed the man as he entered; and the summons seemed to him so strange, and was so unusual, that, though his master was kind and placable, he turned somewhat pale at the thought of having excited his anger.

"Who has been here since I went out, Victor?" said the count, in a mild tone, as soon as he appeared.

"No one, my lord," replied the porter; "not a soul has passed the gates but mademoiselle, and the boy from the fishponds with some fine carp."

"Indeed!" replied the count; "bethink yourself, Victor, for I wish you to be very accurate."

The man still remained firm in the same story, however, and the count then asked if the boy from the fishponds had gone back again.

"Oh yes, directly, my lord," replied the porter. "When he had passed the gates and crossed the court, he took the fish to the wicket at the buttery door, where François, the cook's man, took them from him; and he came back directly."

The count mused for a moment or two, and then inquired, "Have you remarked any one pass by the gates

of the chateau ? I saw the fresh marks of carriage-wheels as I came along the road."

"There was a carriage, my lord, about three hours ago," replied the porter, "with three brown horses and a gray one."

"What were the colours of the liveries ?" said the count.

"There were no liveries at all, monseigneur," replied the porter : "the coachman had a gray coat on, and a club wig as thick as my arm ; but there was not a single lackey with the coach."

In answer to some farther questions from his master, he proceeded to say that the vehicle had driven past as fast as possible, without pausing for a moment, even to let the party which it contained take a view of the castle, which was a high misdemeanour in the porter's eyes ; the chateau of Castelneau being, in his estimation, the very finest edifice that the skill and ingenuity of man ever succeeded in raising from the earth. The information, however, seemed to satisfy the count, who nodded his head, saying, "That will do ;" and the porter, well contented with the event of his interrogation, retired from the presence of his lord.

Annette had longed to speak and detail all she knew of the people in the carriage ; but naturally courtesy had prevented her from interrupting the count till he had done ; and then, before she could speak, he turned to her saying, "Something very strange has occurred to me to-day, Annette."

"And to me also," she replied, with a smile ; "but I interrupt you, my dear father. What were you saying ?"

"Merely," he answered, "that something very strange has occurred, which, unless it be explained hereafter, I suppose I must look upon as the silliest of all idle jests. I received a letter almost immediately after you left me yesterday, calling me to Figeac upon important business. The matter to be treated of, namely, the purchase of the neighbouring estate of Merle, was distinctly mentioned. My own lawyer and notary, I was told, would both meet me at the inn ; and, in fact, there was no room to suspect that I was deceived. I therefore set out as the letter requested me, but found nobody waiting, and no sign of preparation for my coming. This struck me as strange ; but, after waiting half an hour,

lest men should say I am impatient, I sent for the notary, who lives in the town, you know, and then found that he had not the slightest acquaintance with the matter. The lawyer was then sent for, and, as he lives as far off as Lavignac, I was detained long before he came. When he did at length appear, I found that he was as ignorant of the whole transaction as the notary, and, mounting my horse, I rode back hither as fast as possible. But say, my dear child, what is this strange thing that has happened to you which you thus speak of? You have not been robbed, I trust, my Annette? For one can surely walk forth in peace on the banks of the Selle, if anywhere."

"Oh no," replied Annette, "nothing of that kind; but something, if not as unpleasant, at least as unusual," and she proceeded to relate all that had occurred to her. If she softened anything, it was not intentionally, and the count obtained a very accurate knowledge of all that had taken place.

As he listened, his countenance for once was moved, and Annette could see much agitation in his look; more, indeed, than she had ever seen upon his face before. Ere she had done, the count had started up from his seat, and began pacing up and down the room. Annette was astonished and alarmed to see such emotion in one so calm; and, rising also, she approached and twined her beautiful arms around her father by adoption, saying, in an anxious tone, "I fear that my story has grieved you: I hope I have not done wrong."

"Far from it, my dear child," replied the count: "you could but act as you did act; but still, there may be many matters in the tale that may, and that do grieve me. You know, Annette, that you are not my child; you know, however, that you are as much the child of my love as if you were one of my own offspring, and you can guess how terrible it would be for me to lose you."

"Oh, but that will never be," cried Annette. "You do not think that anybody could persuade me to leave you!"

The abbé looked in her face and smiled. He smiled, partly because the assurance gave him pleasure; and yet, strange to say, it was partly because he knew how vain such an assurance was. He did not deceive himself: he knew the time might come, and probably would

come, when even deeper and stronger affections than those which bound Annette to him would take possession of her heart, and when, without loving him less, she would love another more, and, of course, follow the strongest attachment. He smiled, however, kindly; and, as he gazed in that lovely face for a moment, sensations, regrets, visions, if they may be so called, crossed his mind, from which he instantly turned away his thoughts. In that brief space of time, however, the tempting spirit, which ever lies at the bottom of the human heart, seized the moment of tenderness to whisper that he might have been very happy with Annette, not as the child of his adoption, but as the bride of his heart, if years and circumstances had permitted such a thing to be possible. It is a peculiar characteristic of all the suggestions of the dark and subtle enemy of God and man, that each word which the heart is weak enough to receive is written in characters of flame that can never be erased, but which still remain clear and distinct whenever the mind rests upon them; till line after line is added thereunto by the persevering fiend, and the temptation becomes overpowering and complete. This was the first time that such a thought had ever crossed the count's mind, and he instantly turned away his eyes from it as if it were an absolute profanation. He almost scorned himself to have admitted the very idea of it into his mind; yet it had an effect upon him; but that effect was, for the time at least, noble, and high, and pure. From that day forth he became somewhat less familiar with his adopted child. He would kiss her brow and cheek when they met or when they parted, but he touched not her lips, he held her not to his bosom, as he had been accustomed to do: he felt as if it would be unholy so to do after that thought had once entered into his heart; and though it was a painful punishment for one involuntary idea, yet he regarded it as a penance, and endured it with firmness. But he did more, as we shall soon see when I return to the course of the story, which I have somewhat outrun already.

It very rarely happens, indeed, that a conversation of great interest proceeds to its close without interruption. There seems a fatality in it; and every one must have felt how trifles of the most unimportant kind, how importunate babblers and frivolous coxcombs, are constantly permitted, or sent by fate, to break in upon those

conferences on which hangs the weal or woe of our whole existence. The conversation between the Count de Castelneau and Mademoiselle de St. Morin had just reached the point at which we stopped in detailing it, when, from the window of the saloon, the count beheld a carriage with six beautiful horses, together with manifold lackeys on horseback and on foot, enter the gates, which had been thrown open to admit them, and pass onward across the court to the principal door of the chateau.

His countenance resumed all its calmness in a moment. "This is the family of Cajare, Annette," he said: "I heard they had arrived when I was at Figeac; but I dreamed not they would have made us a visit to-day, and could well have spared it. We must do the best to entertain them, however; for courtesy is a duty, my dear child, even to those we do not like or esteem."

"Oh, I dislike Madame de Cajare very much," said Annette.

"And I her husband as much," replied the abbé.

Speeches like these but too often precede, in the false and hollow-hearted world in which we live, the entrance of visitors who are received with the most marked and flattering attention, with bright smiles and professions of delight. Such, however, was not the case with the Count de Castelneau and Annette de St. Morin. The first advanced to meet his guests with slow and stately politeness, inquired after the health of the marquis and marchioness, trusted they had been well since he had seen them, now a period of two years, and hoped that they had greatly enjoyed the pleasures of Paris, but did not even express pleasure at seeing them.

"Ah, Monsieur de Castelneau," said the lady, in a languid tone, "you know that these dreadful vapours from which I suffer never leave me much happiness. If there be anything that I can hope for in life, it is but to pass the rest of my days in a gentle melancholy, without being assailed by any deep grief or great misfortune. Ah! Mademoiselle de St. Morin, how charming you are! I declare you become more lovely every day. Why, during the last few months, what a change and improvement has taken place in your beauty!"

Annette coloured slightly, and replied courteously, but still coldly. The marquise, however, who was always quite satisfied with everything she did herself, perceived

in Annette's manner but that graceful indifference which is always cultivated in courts and great cities by those persons who, having nothing in heart or mind to distinguish them, are forced to make the most of those accidental circumstances of rank and fortune which they either really possess or assume.. Such, indeed, was the combination of graces of person and demeanour, with a chilling coldness which could not be concealed, in Annette's reception of the Marchioness de Cajare, that the latter lady marvelled in her own heart, and asked herself where that country girl could have acquired such a distinguished air and manner.

While the two ladies had thus been conversing, Monsieur de Castelneau had been engaged in paying some attention to the marquis ; and he now turned round, saying to Annette, " My dear child, we are to be honoured with the company of Monsieur and Madame de Cajare to-night : they will do us the honour of supping with us, and sleeping at the chateau. You had better, therefore, summon good Donnine, and give orders that apartments be immediately prepared for our distinguished guests."

Madame de Cajare and Monsieur de Cajare made a thousand formal apologies ; declared that Mademoiselle de St. Morin would think them the most rude and unceremonious people in the world ; but explained that they were on their way to pay a visit to the small town of Fons, and that one of their horses having cast a shoe, and detained them till that late hour, Madame de Cajare was far too timid to pass through the woods in the growing obscurity which was now fast falling over the world.

This statement might be true or it might not, but the Count de Castelneau certainly did not believe it. However, old Donnine, having been summoned to Annette's aid, now appeared in a gown of rich silk brocade, attired with infinitely more smartness than her mistress, though, withal, in garments well suited to her age ; and Annette, having spoken a word or two to her faithful old attendant, quitted the room with her for a moment, to ensure that everything should be done to make their unexpected guests comfortable.

As soon as the young lady and the good old nurse were gone, Madame de Cajare exclaimed, " What a charming creature!" and the count, with a certain spice of malice, which remained from his former habits not-

withstanding all his efforts, chose to misunderstand, and applied the words of the marquise to the good old Don-nine.

"A very charming creature, indeed," he replied, in a grave and somewhat solemn tone: "she was first my ward's nurse, and has since been raised to the dignity of *gouvernante* of the chateau."

The marquise explained, and the count bowed, but gave no farther encouragement to the praises of Annette. The evening passed by, upon the whole, cheerfully: the marquis himself, if he could not be called either a gay, a witty, or a sensible man, being overloaded with the phrases and the commonplaces of the world and the times. There was no subject on earth in regard to which he could not say something; and, being neither diffident of his own powers, nor slow in delivering his own opinions, he himself supplied conversation of a certain kind wherever he went. He neither required nor accepted much assistance, very often answering his own questions as soon as they were asked; and the count found it very easy to entertain a person who was thus willing to play two hands in a game of chit-chat with himself. The marquis tried hard, in the course of the evening, to induce his host to play with him; for gambling was at that time a disease in the city of Paris, with which Monsieur de Cajare was very much afflicted. The count, however, remained firm, and declined, saying, with one of his doubtful smiles, that he had left off gaming when he quitted the Church. The want of that sort of entertainment might have made the evening seem somewhat long to the guests of the chateau de Castelneau, had not the marquise, who perhaps might have some suspicion that her husband wished for a private conversation with his entertainer, retired to her apartment almost immediately after supper, accompanied by Mademoiselle de St. Morin, to do the honours of the house.

No sooner was she gone than Monsieur de Cajare laid regular siege to the mind of the count, seeking to draw from him, by one means or another, some account of Annette, and her prospects in life. He began by accounting for the absence of his daughter, who would be so delighted, he assured the count, to cultivate the acquaintance of Mademoiselle de St. Morin, by stating that she had remained at the chateau of Cajare in order to

receive her brother the baron, who was expected every hour from Paris. He then proceeded once more to comment upon Annette's beauty; but the count listened in silence, without even replying by a look.

At length the marquis ventured upon a bold stroke, and exclaimed, as if he had known well the person of whom he was speaking, "Ah, poor Monsieur de St. Morin! he was in very bad circumstances, I fear, when he died."

"Annette's father was not rich," replied the count.

"I feared so, I feared so," said the marquis: "he was an excellent man."

"A very good man indeed," replied the count, with the same cynical smile.

"I fear he has not left her very well provided for," said the marquis.

Monsieur de Castelneau had a very great inclination not to answer at all, as he saw clearly through the views and purposes with which these suppositions were put forward. The evil spirit did not lose the opportunity, and instantly suggested the question, "Shall I promote by any means, even by a word, the estrangement and the separation from myself of a being who has been for eighteen years the sunshine of my home and the light of my eyes? Shall I aid in uniting her to another by those tender ties which can never bind her to me?" But then the better spirit resumed its sway in a moment, and he said to himself, "Why should I stay it? why should I retard it even by a minute? Would I deprive her of all those blessings that I myself have never known—home, and happiness, and sweet domestic love? Would I thus repay her for having given comfort and consolation, ay, and almost even cheerfulness, to a wrung and sorrowful heart during eighteen years? No, no! Though, if this man's son be like the father, she is no bride for him, yet I may as well make it known to the greedy and covetous world that she is not the dowerless creature that people suppose."

Thought, which, like the fairy, compasses the round earth "ere the Leviathan can swim a league," had been as rapid as usual in conveying all these ideas through the mind of the count; so that the marquis remarked nothing farther than one of those slight pauses which often preceded the reply of Monsieur de Castelneau to anything that was said.

"I really do not know," replied the count, at length, "what you consider not well provided for, Monsieur de Cajare. A gentleman of your great wealth and importance may consider Annette's fortune a mere trifle; but her dower will amount, at least, to sixty thousand livres per annum, perhaps to more; and that will always enable her, as a single woman, to live in comfort, even if she should not marry."

"Oh, but she will marry to a certainty, monsieur," exclaimed Monsieur le Comte de Cajare, whose eyes sparkled with eagerness to secure the prize for his son: "I am sure you could make an advantageous match for her at any time you thought fit to seek it."

"I shall in no degree seek it, Monsieur de Cajare," replied the count, quickly, in order to prevent the other from saying more at that moment. "You know I was some time ago in the neighbouring country of England. They are a strange, mad-headed people, as you are well aware. Torn to pieces by sects and factions in policy and religion; but, among other odd notions, they have a belief, not universal, but very general among them, that a woman has something to do with her own marriage, and that it is consequently better to consult her inclinations. This I believe to be the reason why, in England, one man's wife is not always another man's mistress, as in France.\* I liked the system so much, that I long ago determined Mademoiselle de St. Morin should marry whom she liked, and nobody but whom she liked, reserving to myself, as her guardian, the right of refusing her to any one whose morals, temper, or habits were certain to make her unhappy; but you seem tired, Monsieur de Cajare, and would, I am sure, wish to retire. Allow me to show you the way. Jean! Pierre! Mathieu! here, bring lights. Lights for Monsieur le Marquis de Cajare;" and then, after conducting Monsieur de Cajare to his apartments with the most formal politeness, he retired to his own chamber with his usual quiet step.

\* It must be remembered that this cynical observation of Monsieur de Castelneau applied to the morals of a century ago, and even then was a great deal too general and sweeping, although quite in character with his sarcastic habit of expression, as will be seen whenever "The Maxims of the Count de Castelneau" shall be given to the public.

## CHAPTER XIII.

THE Marquis de Cajare did not quit the chateau of Castelneau without pressing the count and his fair ward to visit his dwelling. Somewhat to Annette's surprise, the count did not hesitate a moment, but accepted the invitation at once, fixed the day for the visit, and seemed well disposed to be on terms of intimacy with a family which she knew he despised at heart. This sudden change in one whose character and demeanour showed in general an unalterable firmness, might well appear strange to poor Annette; but the secret was that, as we have shown, Monsieur de Castelneau had undergone a struggle with himself, and had gained a triumph.

In such circumstances there are few men who do not suffer the first moment of victory to carry them too far; and at that time the count would willingly have given the hand of the fair girl whom he had brought up from infancy to any worthy man who sought it. Feelings of this kind, however, are generally as evanescent as they are strong; and before the third morning after the departure of the marquis and his family had arrived, the count began to regret the promise he had given.

The following day was to be spent at Cajare, and Monsieur de Castelneau would not make any false excuse; but he could not help commenting to Annette, in a few sarcastic words, upon the character of those they were about to visit. The marquis, he said, was a charlatan in his follies as well as in his wit; the marchioness as much a quack in sentiment as her husband was in the want of it. "I have had opportunities of seeing," he continued, "that this vice is hereditary. His father was the same as himself: the daughter has lost nothing of the gift by transmission. It is clearly an heirloom, and the only one in the family; the son surely cannot be without it."

Annette made no reply, for it was seldom that she saw her kind guardian in such a mood, and she loved him less in it. In truth, he had carefully restrained his own sarcastic nature ever since Annette had been with him; for he was unwilling to show her, in one whom

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she loved and revered, an example of anything that he did not wish her to adopt. After a moment's pause, however, he added, "It would not surprise me, my Annette, if this youth were to become a suiter for your hand."

Annette smiled and shook her head. There is an instinctive perception regarding all the natural affections in the mind of women, which, though they often willingly blind themselves to ardent love—as we shut our eyes against the full sunshine—yet shows them many a finer shade and more delicate hue of the same passion in a moment, be it concealed however it may. In the few words the count had spoken, Annette perceived at once that there were apprehensions in his bosom lest she should be sought and won by the young Baron de Cajare; and though she tried not to investigate why the thought might be painful to him—whether because he thought the suiter unworthy of her, or because he liked not the prospect of losing her society—that answering smile and shake of the head spoke plainly, and were intended to speak, "There is no fear he should succeed."

The count understood the smile, and bent down his eyes upon the ground with a meditative look, not very well satisfied that even a part of his feelings should be detected, and more determined than ever to overcome them. But, as the evil spirit is well aware that man's mind is a texture of ideas, he is quite satisfied with adding new ones of an evil kind, and working them intimately in and out, as a weaver works into the warp the thread upon his shuttle. Every time that the mind rests upon wrong, a new throw of that shuttle is taken, and the thread that it bears is the more thoroughly blended with the whole web of our thoughts.

On the subsequent day, early in the morning, the count and his adopted child set forth, and about an hour afterward reached the great house of glass and gilding, called the chateau de Cajare. Their approach had been observed by the inhabitants; and on the steps leading up to the chief entrance appeared the Marquis de Cajare himself, with a young man of some six or seven-and-twenty years of age, splendidly dressed in the military costume of the day. He was handsome in countenance, graceful in person, not the least like the Marquis de Cajare in any respect, and with an expression which, though not particularly marked in any way, was deci-

dedly agreeable and prepossessing. He was rather grave than otherwise : there was none of the light smile about his lip which generally characterized the vain youth of the metropolis ; and as he bowed low on being introduced to the count and Mademoiselle de St. Morin, and followed with the former, while his father led the latter into the chateau by the tips of the fingers, his calm and gentlemanly demeanour, his handsome person, and superior tone of manners, made the count feel ten times more uncomfortable than if he had displayed all the idle frivolity and licentious emptiness of a *petit-maître* of those days.

Still, however, the Count de Castelneau struggled against such emotions ; and as he walked on slowly up the steps, answering little more than monosyllables to the courteous words which the young officer addressed to him, he might be seen once or twice to close his teeth hard, as if to keep down the feelings that were within him. Before they had passed the threshold of the chateau, however, he had again triumphed over himself, and with admirable patience suffered himself to be led by Madame de Cajare and her daughter to take breakfast in a *bosquet*, which the marchioness informed him was dedicated to love and pensiveness. There were a fountain and an urn, and two or three Cupids, very naked, and somewhat over-fat about the lower part of the back, and there were inscriptions in verse below from the flowing pen of Mademoiselle de Cajare. The metre was not very good, nor the poetry ; but there was a certain spice of wit in the composition, which was employed in such a manner as to leave the reader in doubt whether the fair writer was laughing at the Cupids or not.

Monsieur de Castelneau, on his part, read the verses, and treated them much in the same way as mademoiselle treated the Cupids, commenting upon them in a strain which left it very doubtful whether he did or did not admire them.

In the mean time, Annette, after having been welcomed in rapture by Mademoiselle de Cajare, had been conducted to the *bosquet* by the marquis. His son, also, had fallen back to her side ; and though he did not press any very great attentions upon her, yet all he did say was gentlemanly and high toned. Annette was struck and pleased ; and certainly, if the Count de Castelneau

had contrived a plan for making her fall in love with the Baron de Cajare, he could not have laid out the events more cunningly for that purpose than by drawing such a picture of that gentleman as he had suggested to her mind, and then presenting such an extraordinary contrast in reality. Annette de St. Morin, however—though, from her inexperience, from the warmth and tenderness of her heart, from a bright imagination, and a thousand other qualities of the mind, she might very well fall in love at first sight—paradoxical as it may seem, was not one to fall in love easily. It required many high qualities to win her affection, though her love would have been given in a moment as soon as her heart was satisfied that those qualities were really possessed. Such was not the case with Monsieur de Cajare; though in manners, appearance, conduct, he was altogether different from what she had expected; his conversation did not afford a sufficient insight into his thoughts to convince her that the heart was high, and noble, and generous, the mind bright, pure, and unsullied.

No event of importance took place throughout the day: to Annette it passed happily and cheerfully enough; indeed, more so than any day she had spent in general society; for her happiest hours had always been those which she had passed with her father by adoption. The young officer, who contrived now to be a good deal by her side, had evidently a finished and refined taste, had an intimate acquaintance with the works of art in various countries, and had seen and known many of the most distinguished men of the day. He expressed his opinions and he communicated his information pleasantly and unobtrusively; and, withal, he had that intelligent look, that meaning smile, which seems to presuppose a familiarity with our internal thoughts and feelings, and soon makes friends with the spirit within us.

Annette, on her part, neither encouraged nor repelled his attention; but, as I have said, the day passed pleasantly for her, till she saw very evidently that the Count de Castelneau was uneasy. She did not fully understand why this should be, but felt inclined to believe that he knew more of the Baron de Cajare than he had stated, and that what he did know was disadvantageous to that young nobleman. As soon as she perceived this, she listened with less satisfaction to the baron's conversa-

tion, and attached herself more closely to the side of the count. Monsieur de Castelneau remarked that she did so, and was pleased, it must be acknowledged, at the result; but, at the same time, was rather mortified that she had discovered his uneasiness. He did not wish that uneasiness to be perceived, and would only have prevented her conversing farther with the young officer upon the condition of doing so without appearing to do it. To remove the impression as much as possible, however, his warmth of manner towards the baron increased as Annette became more cold; and he ended, ere they took their departure, by inviting him in a hospitable tone to the chateau of Castelneau. The young officer bowed, and promised to take advantage of the invitation; but the next day passed over without his coming, and the next. The third day he appeared; and the count, pleased with his apparent indifference, treated him hospitably, and gave him no discouragement.

Advanced thus far, the Baron de Cajare did not fail to press his acquaintance more rapidly; sometimes he saw the count alone, sometimes the count and Annette; but there grew a tenderness in his manner towards Mademoiselle de St. Morin, a softness in his voice, a look of deep and thoughtful interest, which, every time that the count saw him, made his heart ache with painful anticipations. He struggled boldly and firmly against his own feelings, however. He compared himself firmly with the young baron; and when he asked himself which was best calculated to win and to retain the love of a young, bright, ardent being like Annette de St. Morin, he could not but acknowledge that it was not himself, though he felt within him depth of feeling and powers of mind which he knew the other did not possess. He determined that he would do nothing to stay the course of events; but every step in their progress now gave him agony. Although many painful thoughts were but too familiar with his mind, these seemed more painful still, or, at all events—piled up as they were upon other things—they seemed to render the load upon his bosom intolerable, and yet he would not fly from those thoughts, but, on the contrary, gave himself up to them in manifold solitary and painful fits of musing. He would walk forth long by himself; he would shut himself in his chamber from all society, even from that of Annette. He would ride out far through the lonely

woods, or over the wild hills and moors, and he would commune with and task his own heart, and accuse himself of gross, and bitter, and shameful selfishness ; and often would he ask himself whether it were really possible that he was animated by any coarse and common passion towards a creature so pure, so sweet, so good, whom he had loved as his own child from infancy up to womanhood.

There, however, his own heart acquitted him, and the judge was just. No, he said, all that he sought was that she should not leave him ; that she should not love another better than him ; that she should not take from him, to give to any one else, that affection which was the sole possession which his spirit valued, the only thing that he had ever really sought, or cared for, or loved, or prized. It had been balm to him when his heart was wounded and bleeding ; it had been as a beautiful flower upon his pathway when all the rest of life had seemed a desert ; it had been his one consolation, his hope, his trust ; it had been, in short, his existence, for what is existence without affection ?

One day, when he had been thus thinking for many an hour, as he rode through some of the most beautiful parts of the neighbouring country, without taking any note of tree, or stone, or rock, or river, he returned at a quicker pace to the chateau of Castelneau, and found the Baron de Cajare sitting with Annette alone.

There was a slight flush on Mademoiselle de St. Morin's cheek, and the young officer was looking upon the floor, somewhat pale ; but the count, though he paused a moment as he entered, and looked from the one to the other, made no observation, and seated himself near the window, bearing such an aspect that conversation was renewed with difficulty, and each subject was dropped again as soon as it was started. At length the baron rose, and, taking his leave, mounted his horse in the courtyard, and rode away from the chateau. The count watched him from the window with a knitted brow and thoughtful eye ; and then turning to Mademoiselle de St. Morin, he said, "Annette, my dear child—"

But, almost as he spoke, he turned deadly pale, put his hand to his heart and then to his head, grasped ineffectually at the arm of a chair that stood near, and fell forward, fainting, upon the ground. Servants were speedily called : physicians were procured from Figeac and

Cahors ; but, before they arrived, the count, having been stretched on a sofa, had recovered his recollection, and declared himself quite well. It proved, however, that he was not so ; and he soon found that such was the case when he attempted to rise.

When the physicians came, they declared that he was not only seriously ill, but in much danger. It matters not what was the barbarous name that they gave to his complaint, their judgment was correct ; and for nearly six weeks he was not permitted to quit the house, or to take any exercise but in moving slowly from his bedroom to the saloon. He was forbidden to read or to write ; and the hours would have passed sadly and slowly had it not been for the presence of Annette de St. Morin. She read to him, she sang to him, she played to him, she gave up her whole thoughts to him alone. For many weeks she never set her foot beyond the doors, nor did she see any one but good old Donnine, who was the partner of her toils. Several times the family of Cajare applied for admittance when Annette was with the count, and twice they begged to speak with Mademoiselle de St. Morin if the count could not see them ; but Annette distinctly and markedly refused.

The days passed on, as they will pass in sickness or in health, flying like the shadow of a cloud, and leaving nothing behind. Some gradual improvement took place in the health of the count ; and one day, after what seemed an effort to command himself, he asked whether any one had lately called at the chateau. Annette replied that there had been no one.

“ Not the family of Cajare ? ” he said.

“ Not for ten days,” replied Annette, calmly.

“ Not the baron ? ” asked the count, more eagerly.

“ Oh no ! ” replied Annette, with a bright and happy smile. “ Thank Heaven, he has been gone to his regiment this fortnight.”

“ What mean you, my dear child ? ” said the count, almost rising from the sofa. “ You seem happy that he is gone.”

“ I am well pleased,” she said, “ though not exactly happy ; for it matters little to me whether he went or stayed, in truth ; but still it is pleasanter he should be away.”

“ What has he done to offend you, Annette ? ” demanded the count, gazing inquiringly on her face. “ He must

have done something to make you angry, by the way you speak."

"Oh no, my dear father!" replied Annette—for by that endearing name she always called him—"he did nothing to make me angry; but he spoke, the last time I saw him, of the joy I would have, some day, in quitting this dull old chateau, and leaving the tiresome society to which I have been so long confined, for all the pomp, and wit, and brightness of the capital."

The count gazed upon her face for two or three minutes without making any reply; but there was a well-pleased smile upon his countenance, which spoke satisfaction and relief.

"He knew you not, my Annette," he replied, at length, "he knew you not;" and, without other comment, he sunk back upon the cushions of the sofa. But his health improved more rapidly from that day forward.

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#### CHAPTER XIV.

FROM time to time the Count de Castelneau had urged Annette not to deprive herself altogether of air and exercise on his account, but to go out either on horseback or on foot. She had always avoided doing so, however, and remained steadfast to her post as long as the least danger existed in the case of her friend and protector. Nor would she quit him till he was again permitted to read and to amuse himself; but, when the physicians took off the prohibition from his books, the count insisted that she should take exercise for one or two hours during each day. Nor did he do so without cause; for, during the long course of his illness, the colour had somewhat faded from Annette's cheek, and the brightness of her eye had been dimmed by anxiety and watching. To see him better, in itself, did her good; and one or two walks or rides through the forest soon brought back the rose to its sweet resting-place. The count was delighted to see her look so much better, and now insisted that she should leave him more frequently than she had hitherto done, promising soon to join her in her rambles. On the fourth day after she had begun

to go out, Mademoiselle de St. Morin proceeded on her walk alone, in the cool of the evening. It had been a bright sunshiny day, somewhat fatiguing from the great heat, and the world around seemed full of repose and calm tranquillity. The birds of spring were yet in song, and the rich notes of the blackbird were heard all through the woods, although the nightingale was now silent. The sun, softened down, like a buoyant heart that has just known enough of sorrow to be calm in its cheerfulness, peeped through the boughs of the tall trees, and poured its light underneath the green branches, gilding every inequality of the mossy carpet of the forest with warm streams of yellow light; but the fresh and balmy air of evening was abroad, and a thousand sweet scents were shaken from the wings of the wind. It was an evening to rejoice in, with the high, pure, holy rejoicing which raises the heart from God's works to God himself, and glorifies his name as he has told us it may best be glorified. In the calm, and the stillness, and the freshness, and the brightness of that hour, in its perfume and its melody, there was a call to joy and adoration which the heart of Annette de St. Morin was not formed to resist. She walked on, thinking of the beauty of the Almighty works, and of the goodness and greatness of Him who made them; all her sensations were joyful, and all her thoughts were praise.

Thus proceeded she till she came to the same spot where she had sat not very many weeks before, when she had been accosted by the party of travellers whose strange demeanour seemed to have begun a new epoch in her existence. There were the little cross and fountain, there the bright stream winding on its way, there the bank where she had been seated; and the whole was now filled sweetly with the soft light of the declining sun, the rays of which glittered on the bosom of the water, and seemed to dive for the pebbles at the bottom. The dark wood rose up behind, shrouding, as it were, that sweet spot in its sombre mantle. Annette placed herself where she had been seated before the arrival of the strangers; and the scene, of course, brought its recollections with it. Many a curious question and speculation came also in the train of memory; and she sat musing for about twenty minutes, and asking herself who could be the persons whom she had

there seen? What could be the real cause of the agitation which one of the party had displayed?

She was deep in this meditation, when she suddenly heard a sound close to her; and, turning quickly round, she beheld, to her surprise and consternation, a gaunt she-wolf, followed by two young cubs. It was not the period of the year when those animals generally roam; but sometimes, from heat and want of water, they become very furious even in the midst of summer, especially in Auvergne and some of the midland districts of France. They usually fly, indeed, from any human being if not hard pressed and if not fled from; but any sudden motion seems to excite their ferocity, and make them turn either to attack others or to defend themselves. Annette knew that such is the case, and had more than once seen a wolf in the forest without meeting any injury or suffering any alarm. At the moment, however, her nerves were somewhat unstrung by long attendance on her sick friend. The beast, too, was close to her, running fast, as if pursued by some one; and, giving way to terror, she started up with a quick scream.

The animal instantly sprang at her throat, but luckily caught the collar of the mantle which she wore in its teeth, and tore it off, only slightly grazing the skin. The violence of the attack, however, made the poor girl reel back against the tree and nearly fall. The wolf was in the very act of springing at her again, and the heart of poor Annette was faint with terror, when there came suddenly the sound of a shot, and the ferocious beast rolled over on its side.

It was not killed; and, though severely wounded, was struggling on its feet again with a fierce howl, when a gentleman on horseback galloped quickly up, sprang to the ground, and, setting his foot upon the body of the animal, held it firmly down. Mad with pain, it bit the heel of his boot so hard that he could scarcely shake it off; but, drawing his horse towards him by the rein which was over his arm, while he still held down the wolf with his foot, he took a pistol from the left-hand holster and discharged it into the furious animal's head. The wolf moved no more, but it was still with difficulty that he withdrew his heel from its jaws, as he turned to aid Mademoiselle de St. Morin, who had now sunk upon

the ground, and was supporting herself against the boll of the tree.

Poor Annette, as may well be supposed, was well-nigh fainting ; and the effect of terror being very often, as we all know, more severe after the danger has passed away than before, for several minutes she could not speak, even to give one word of thanks, or reply to the many questions which were asked her by the gentleman who had come to her aid.

He treated her with all kindness, and care, and tenderness ; brought water in his hand from the little fountain to sprinkle upon her temples and forehead ; and, although he gazed upon her with interest, and perhaps with admiration, yet his look was respectful, and such as Annette could have met at any time without casting down her eyes. He assured her again and again that there was no danger ; and taking her hand, which still trembled very much, in order to call her attention, he pointed to the wolf lying dead, saying, "It can hurt nobody now, if it has not hurt you already. Good Heaven!" he continued, seeing a drop or two of blood upon the part of her dress which covered her bosom, "I fear it *has* hurt you ! Let me carry you home for assistance ! Surely you are Mademoiselle de St. Morin ! Let me carry you home !"

He was about to raise her in his arms, but Annette prevented him by laying her hand upon his, and saying in a low tone, "No, no, I am not hurt, only faint with fear. It is very foolish ; I shall be better in a moment."

The gentleman, who had kneeled beside her for the purpose of lifting her from the ground, continued in the same posture, gazing upon her with much interest, and endeavouring, to the best of his power, to reassure her, but still expressing a fear that she was in some degree injured. "No," she said, speaking more freely after the pause of a moment or two, "no, I can assure you it is nothing. The wolf only tore my mantle at the first spring, but the second would have killed me if it had not been for your arrival. How can I ever thank you ?"

"Oh, think not of it, dear lady !" the stranger replied ; "it was but a very small service, and one which I would have performed, of course, for the lowest peasant-girl in the neighbourhood. How much more gladly, then, for you !"

Annette smiled faintly, and looked up to the face of her deliverer for the first time, supposing from his words that, though the voice was unknown to her, he must be some one with whom she was already acquainted; but the face was equally strange, though it was by no means a countenance to be forgotten when once beheld.

"I am ashamed," said Annette, raising herself slowly, "I am ashamed to acknowledge that I do not recollect the person of a gentleman who has rendered me so great a service, though, from what you say, I suppose, of course, I have had the pleasure of meeting you before."

"No, dear lady," her companion replied; "although I am a native of this part of France, circumstances have prevented me from ever forming your acquaintance; but I have heard much and often of Mademoiselle de St. Morin from those who know and esteem her, and I can but say, that if I could have chosen the person in all France to whom I would most willingly have rendered such a service as this, I should have named yourself."

Such courteous speeches were then so common in France, that the stranger's words sounded in Annette's ears as a mere casual compliment. "You are too kind," she replied; "but I can assure you that my guardian, the Count de Castelneau, who lives not far hence, will be most happy to thank you gratefully for the great service you have rendered me, and would do it much better than I can do it, though I feel the gratitude I owe you as deeply as any one can."

"I fear, madam," replied the stranger, "that it will be impossible for me to visit the Count de Castelneau at the present time; but when you are well enough, I will accompany you so far back towards the chateau as to ensure that no farther evil shall befall you."

"If it be not wrong for me to ask it then," said Annette, "may I inquire to whom I am thus indebted for my life?"

The stranger looked down upon the ground in silence for a moment or two, and then gazing up in her face with a peculiar smile, he replied, "In answer to your question, dear lady, I might give you a false name were I so disposed; but I do not think falsehood is ever justified by any circumstances, and I would rather risk offending you, and seeming rude, by giving you no reply

than an untrue one. Yet, if I judge of you rightly, you will forgive me when I tell you it is necessary to my safety that my being in this part of the country should not be known."

"I would forgive you, by all means," replied Annette; "but there is nothing to forgive, though of course I should have been glad, had you thought right, to know the name of him who has delivered me from a great danger; but be it exactly as you please."

The stranger again cast down his eyes for a moment, and then answered in a somewhat sorrowful tone, "I fear, notwithstanding, that you are a little offended."

"No, indeed," replied Annette; "very far from it. I could, of course, only wish to know your name, sir, in order to place it, as it were, in the register of memory, coupled with the greatest service, perhaps, that has ever yet been rendered to me by any one."

"Then you shall have it, lady," replied the stranger, "but not now. I will find means to see you before I quit this part of the country, and you will forgive me my silence now when you hear all my reasons for it."

"Indeed," answered Annette, smiling again, "I will not let you diminish my feeling of obligation to you, sir, by persuading me that I have anything to forgive. Whether we do meet again or not, I shall ever recollect the assistance you have this day rendered me with the deepest gratitude, and think of you as one who has saved my life."

"Though you estimate the service more highly than it deserves," replied the stranger, "it is so pleasant to me that you should thus over-estimate it, that I will not try to make you think otherwise. One thing, perhaps, you have indeed to thank me for, which is the fact of having conquered a momentary weak fear of hurting you in the attempt to save you. As I was riding through the by-paths of the wood before I saw you, the wolf and its cubs ran on for some way before me. At the turn—up there by those holly-bushes—I lost sight of the animal for an instant; but the next moment, hearing your scream, and galloping on, I beheld it flying at your throat. As soon as I heard your cry I had taken a pistol from the holster, but for a moment I hesitated to fire, for fear of missing the ferocious beast and hitting you. I soon saw, however, that there was no time to be lost: I rarely miss my mark, and did not in this in-

stance, as you know ; though, had I been less apprehensive, I might have killed the wolf at the first shot, and then it would not have bit my heel in the way that it has done."

Annette started with a look of fear and anxiety, and saw that the moss round the spot where the stranger's foot rested was stained for some way with blood.

"Oh ! come to the chateau," she said, eagerly. "Come to the chateau, and have the wound attended to. I fear, indeed I fear that you are a good deal hurt."

Her countenance expressed her apprehensions even more than her words ; but the stranger only laughed, assured her that the bite was a mere nothing, and would be well in a few days.

"I will accompany you," he said, "till we come within sight of the chateau, dear lady. I see you are now well enough to walk home ; and I can only say that I am most sincerely grateful to some indescribable expectation of I knew not what, which led me through this part of the forest to-day. To tell the truth," he added, after a brief pause, accompanying his words with a gay, frank smile, "there might be some expectation, some hope, perhaps, of seeing Mademoiselle de St. Morin, though certainly there was neither expectation nor hope of even conversing with her, far less of rendering her any aid."

There was something in the tone and the manner, in a slight touch of embarrassment which mingled with the frankness, in a degree of wavering in the voice and sparkling in the eye, that showed the words to be not a mere thing of course. The colour rose slightly in Annette's cheek at the compliment which the stranger's speech implied ; though there is many a woman who would have sought to make that compliment greater and more direct, by pretending not to understand it, Annette was not one of those. She shrunk from it as some plants do from even the most delicate touch ; and she only replied, "I think it would be much better for you to accompany me to the chateau, and have the wound dressed. You may perfectly trust to my kind guardian Monsieur de Castelneau, for he would betray no man, and far less one who has saved my life."

The stranger, however, still resisted her entreaty, but walked on by Annette's side, leading his horse by the bridle, and giving her assistance at every little rough

spot of the forest road, though he did not absolutely offer his arm to support her still agitated and wavering steps.

Annette did not construe such forbearance into any neglect of what was due to her as a lady, or into any want of kind consideration for her yet scarcely allayed terror. The stranger's manner was all courteous, and his words and tone so kind, so tender—if we may use that word in its proper sense of gentle and compassionate—that Mademoiselle de St. Morin felt there was nothing wanting in his demeanour to make her at ease by his side. There was, indeed, an expression of interest and admiration in his eyes when he looked upon her, which might have agitated her had his whole manner not been even on the colder side of respect. She would have taken his arm without the slightest hesitation had he offered it, but she did not think worse of him for refraining.

Thus they walked on somewhat slowly towards the chateau, sometimes speaking, but sometimes silent for several minutes. At length the stranger said rather abruptly, after an interval of thought, “Might it not be better, Mademoiselle de St. Morin, not to mention at all to Monsieur de Castelneau what has occurred to-day?”

Annette started, and looked full in her companion's face; for she had imagined—why and wherefore it would be difficult to tell; perhaps from his countenance, which was noble and open; perhaps from his having rendered her an important service, and thus won gratitude on his side—but she had imagined and convinced herself that he was all that is frank and sincere. “Oh no!” she replied, eagerly, after that inquiring look; “I always tell him everything that occurs. I should be unworthy of the kindness he has ever shown me if I could conceal anything from him.”

“You mistake me, I think,” said the stranger, with a smile. “I only meant till the count is better. I have heard that he is very ill; and one of the physicians who is attending him, and who also sees frequently a sick relation of my own, informed me that anything which agitates Monsieur de Castelneau is likely to cause a relapse in his present state. You know best, however. I only feared that to hear of the great danger of one whom he loves—whom he must love—so dearly, might

perhaps retard his recovery. But no one can judge better than you."

The cloud cleared away from Annette's face in a moment; she felt that she had done her companion wrong in her own thoughts, and with the noble candour of her nature she hastened to acknowledge it.

"I beg your pardon," she said; "I did mistake you, and I am sorry for so doing; for I am sure you think as I do, that to a person who has always loved, and been kind, and generous, and good to us, as Monsieur de Castelneau has been to me, perfect sincerity and truth are always the best—are in fact a duty."

"Indeed I do, Mademoiselle de St. Morin," replied the stranger, warmly. "There may be many people who admire you for your beauty, but it is for such feelings as those which you have just expressed that I can most admire you. It is for actions founded on such feelings that I have learned to esteem you from my early youth."

Mademoiselle de St. Morin coloured at the stranger's words, although they were very pleasant to her ear; not so much because they were in praise of herself, as because they showed that her first impressions of her companion's character was not incorrect. He marked the blood rising in her cheek, however, and hastened instantly to give another turn to what he was saying.

"I think," he continued, "that we may very easily lay down a rule for ourselves in setting out in life, by which we may satisfy our own heart, and yet guard against the dangers of over-confidence. In dealing with others our maxim should be, perfect candour to all those who love us, who are frank with us, and whom we can esteem; reserve towards those whom we have no reason to trust or any reason to distrust, but truth to all."

"Oh, I agree with you heartily," cried Annette, gazing up in the fine countenance of him who spoke those words, with one of those winning looks of pleasure that from such eyes as hers are hard to be resisted; and from that moment there were many of the cold and iron barriers which society raises up between strangers cast down for her and her companion.

They walked slowly on, then, speaking together as if they had been old friends. Both felt happy in the communication thus established between them: both felt pleased and interested in discovering new things in each

other's hearts, which harmonized well with the thoughts and feelings of their own. They walked slowly, I have said, but yet the time seemed very short ere, through the opening of the wood, they saw some of the detached towers of the chateau, and the stranger paused to take leave of Mademoiselle de St. Morin.

"I believe," he said, "that I must here bid you adieu. I need hardly add that I regret it much, for I have certainly passed an hour of very great happiness by your side."

Annette cast her eyes down; she felt that she could have said the same, and on any former occasion the natural straightforward candour of her heart would have made her do so at once. But now, for some reason, or rather, I should say, from some feeling which she could not account for, her lips would not utter such a confession, and she remained silent while her companion went on.

"And now, perhaps," he continued, "I am leaving you never to see you again. However, I trust that you will believe me when I say that I shall ever recollect you, and the short, the too short time I have spent with you, as among the very brightest memories of a life which has had but too few of such sweet things to remember. It is very hard," he added, with a sigh, "that if, in the midst of the great solitude of existence, we do find some beings with whom we could joyfully spend many a long day, we are almost sure to have but a short glimpse of them, and never to see them again. I am sure, Mademoiselle de St. Morin," he went on, seeing the colour flutter in her cheek, "I am sure that you do not misunderstand me, nor think for one moment that I mean anything but what is equally respectful and true towards you, or anything, indeed, that even this very short acquaintance does not fully justify me in saying."

"Oh, no, no," replied the young lady, eagerly; "it was not that! I only wish to tell you, and did not very well know how to say it, that I am very, very grateful for your kindness to me; equally grateful to you, indeed, for saving my life, and for your kind and considerate conduct since; and I do hope and trust," she continued, growing bolder as she spoke, "that, so far from never meeting again, we may meet soon, and meet often. I may add that it will be your fault if we do not; for I can venture to assure you that the gates of the

chateau of Castelneau will ever be open to you, and that I myself and my more than father will be very, very glad to show you how grateful we are for what you have done in my defence."

The stranger looked much gratified; but he replied, "Do not, dear lady, do not tempt me too much; and, should I be prevented from taking advantage of so kind an invitation, do not, pray do not say that it is my fault, but believe, on the contrary, that it is my misfortune: and now, though every minute may be sweet, I will not detain you longer, but pray Heaven to bless and keep you in its especial care."

Thus saying, he took her hand respectfully and pressed his lips upon it; and she, wishing him good-by, proceeded on her way towards the chateau, bearing with her feelings which she had never experienced before, but not such as to prevent her from acknowledging boldly to her own heart that she should be very sorry indeed if this first meeting with the stranger should be the last.

From this fact it will clearly be perceived by the learned reader—learned in that most difficult, obscure, and abstruse book, the human heart—that Annette was not in the least degree in love with her companion of the last half hour; for, had she been so, she would never have acknowledged anything to her own heart at all, but would have courted, on the contrary, that sort of mental blindness to all that was passing in her own bosom, of which the bandage over Cupid's eyes is but a just emblem. However that may be, in the short space between the wood and the chateau, she asked herself several times whether it would or would not be better to tell the count, in his present state of health, what had occurred to her. It was scarcely fair to ask whether—hidden from her own eyes, in the deep recesses of the heart—any shy spirit put off upon her, like a coiner passing false money for real, one sort of motives for another. Suffice it that her heart was too upright by nature to suffer one wish for concealment to affect her conduct; and before she had reached the gates of the chateau, she had made up her mind to tell the count the whole, but to do so carefully and cautiously, for fear of alarming him.

## CHAPTER XV.

ANNETTE entered the saloon, where the Count de Castelneau was stretched upon the sofa reading, with the mantle which the wolf had torn from her neck cast over her arm. The count laid down the book, and raised himself to speak with her; but, the moment that he did so, the penetrating eyes of strong affection discovered at once that something had gone wrong. "Come hither, my Annette," he cried. "What is the matter? You are not well; your cheek is very pale, my dear child; your mantle torn, and blood upon your bosom."

"Oh, it is nothing," replied Annette, smiling, and seeing all her plans of communicating her intelligence with caution overthrown in a moment. "It is nothing, I can assure you, my dear father. A little accident which I met with in the wood! It might have been more serious; but, as it is, no harm has happened."

"But speak, Annette, speak!" said the count. "What is it? It must have been something serious indeed to leave your cheek so pale."

"Oh no, indeed," she answered. "I was frightened, but not hurt. The truth is, I met a wolf in the wood—"

"And he flew at you!" cried the count, eagerly. "He attacked you! Is it not so, Annette? How did you escape, my girl?"

"Nay, do not be alarmed," said Annette: "you see I am quite safe. It was an old wolf followed by two young ones, and she did, as you think, fly at my throat: she caught my mantle in her teeth and tore it off, scratching me, not with her teeth, I think, but with the clasps of the mantle. She was springing at me again, however, when a gentleman rode up and shot her with a pistol which he took from his holsters. The animal was not quite dead, and bit his heel very severely; but I did not see much of what happened then, for I was nearly fainting."

"The Baron de Cajare!" said the count. "Was it the Baron de Cajare?"

"Oh, no!" exclaimed Annette: "quite a different person."

"Who then! who then!" asked Monsieur de Castelnau, quickly.

"Nay, that I cannot tell," replied his adopted child; "for, although he was as courteous as he could be in all other things, he would not give his name; and he told me very plainly, when he had escorted me nearly to the chateau, that it was probable I should never see him again."

"Indeed!" said the count. "Some stranger travelling through the country perhaps."

"No, certainly he was not that," answered Annette. "He knew who I was, though I did not know him. He had heard, too, that you were ill, and seemed well acquainted with all about you; but yet I could not get him to come on to the chateau, though the wolf had bit him in the heel severely, I should imagine from the blood I saw. He told me, however, that he had particular reasons for not making himself known."

The count turned somewhat pale, and inquired, "What age was he?"

"That I can hardly tell," replied Annette, "but—"

"Was he old or young?" demanded the count, interrupting her.

"Oh, young!" exclaimed Annette, "young, certainly! Perhaps five or six-and-twenty, but not more."

The count seemed relieved, and answered, "It is a pity your gallant deliverer would not come in, my Annette: you might have told him that he could trust me in safety."

"I did so," answered Annette, "but I could not prevail. He was very obdurate indeed, I can assure you."

"He must be obdurate indeed, my dear child, with whom *you* could not prevail," said the count; "but go, my Annette, wash away the blood from your neck, and then come back. You shall instantly write a note for me to the Baron de Nogent. He is the louvetier\* of the canton; and, though it be not the proper season for hunting them, we must not suffer them to roam about in this way, at any time of the year."

The note was accordingly written in the course of that evening, and was sent over to Castel Nogent by a

\* Many noblemen were formerly invested with this office of louvetier, or titular hunter of the wolves in their districts; nor is it yet altogether abolished, although the wolves in France have greatly decreased in numbers since that time.

man on horseback, who returned in about two hours. He brought no note in answer to that of the count, but merely a message. The Baron de Nogent, he said, was ill in bed ; but he had told one of his servants to reply, that, having heard that one or two wolves had been seen in the neighbourhood, he had already ordered the dogs and men, which he was obliged to maintain for that purpose, to clear the country of the savage beasts, and the hunters were even then in the woods putting these commands into execution.

“ Ill, is he ?” demanded the count.

“ Yes, my lord,” answered the servant : “ he has been very ill, his people said, for more than three weeks.”

“ I grieve that I cannot go over to see him,” said Monsieur de Castelneau, turning to Annette ; “ he is one of the few men whom I can respect and esteem. Could you not ride over to-morrow, my Annette, and visit him for me ? He is so solitary at all times, that I cannot but think in sickness it would be a comfort to him to see you.”

“ Oh, I will go willingly,” replied Annette. “ You know how I love and reverence him. I wish from my heart he would let us do anything to make his solitary hours more cheerful than they are.”

Before the sun had risen into the meridian on the following morning, Annette mounted a jennet, which had been bought and trained for her own riding ; and followed, as was then customary, by two or three servants, she took the road towards Fons, and in little more than an hour had reached Castel Nogent. After some delay, the baron admitted her to his sick chamber, and thanked her for her visit with kindness and sincerity. She found him very much worn ; but he assured her that he was much better than he had been, and would soon be well. For more than an hour Annette sat by him, striving to cheer and amuse him ; and so successful did she find herself, that she promised to return in a day or two if her guardian continued to improve in health. The baron caught eagerly at her offer, and reminded her of it when she went away ; and Annette, repeating that she would not forget, left him with a heart satisfied and gay at having done an act of kindness, and seeing that it was not only appreciated, but successful to the fullest extent she could desire.

She was riding quickly through the woods, with the

beauty of the scene, the fineness of the day, and the exhilarating motion of her horse all adding to the glad sensations of her own heart, when suddenly, at one of the cross-roads of the forest, she was met by a gentleman on horseback, who for an instant drew in his rein as if with surprise and hesitation, but the moment after rode up to her with a low inclination of the head, and turned his horse upon the same path which she was pursuing.

The reader has already divined, what Annette discovered at first sight, that the stranger who now joined her was the person who had saved her from the wolf. He was differently dressed, however, and was now clothed in a rich hunting-suit, which became him well. It was impossible not to own that in person and in features he was a very handsome man ; but that was little in Annette's estimation, when compared with the high and noble expression of his countenance, which would certainly prove Nature to be a sad deceiver, she thought, if his heart were not generous and kind.

Mademoiselle de St. Morin received him with a glad and open smile, held out her hand frankly towards him, and said at once, "Oh ! I am so glad to see you again."

The stranger pressed the hand which she gave in his own, and his sparkling eyes replied in language not to be mistaken, that, if she was glad to see him, he was no less so to see her. There was, however, in the young lady's look a gay and playful expression, a meaning, perhaps it might be called, which surprised her companion ; and while the grooms dropped farther behind, and she rode on with him side by side, she led the conversation cheerfully and brightly, as if she had known him for many years.

"I am happy," he said at length, "most happy to see you so well, and that your fright has not hurt your health or spirits."

"You think my spirits high, perhaps," answered Annette, "because I am more gay and familiar with you than I was when last we met. There is a reason for it, however. Do you know what that reason is ?"

"No, indeed," he replied, "I cannot even divine it. Nay, more, I have learned from many an old fiction and tale of my childhood, that when anything which makes us very happy is dark and mysterious, we should never pry into the secret, lest we dispel the charm."

"But I will tell you the secret," replied Annette, "for the magic is all very simple, I can assure you. The secret then is, that I now know who you are; and, believe me, that discovery makes a very great difference; for, although I must ever have been grateful, had you been who you might, there are some whom it is a pleasure to be grateful, to some a pain."

"Are you sure you are right, dear lady?" said the stranger.

"I am sure," she replied, "quite sure, though no one has betrayed you."

"How then is it possible you can know?" he demanded; "for I am certain that you never saw me until two days ago."

"Nay, I discovered it very easily," she answered; "by studying the face of a father after I had seen that of a son. Not that the features are alike, but the expression. You will understand better what I mean when I tell you that I have just been to Castel Nogent, and sat with the baron for near an hour."

"Then all I have to say, dear lady," replied the other, "is, that I must now not only beg you to be cautious, but most particularly request that you will confine the discovery you have made to your own breast alone. I think I may ask this of you without asking anything wrong; and I believe you will grant it when you know that I am now both absent from my regiment without leave, and contrary to the express commands of the officer next in rank above myself; I mean the Baron de Cajare. I received news that my father was at the point of death; and as my presence was not wanted with the regiment, I merely announced to Monsieur de Cajare that it was my intention to visit this part of the country, stating my motives at full. He was himself wasting his time in Paris at the distance of two days' journey from the corps, but he thought fit to send a messenger, prohibiting my coming into this part of France. I instantly lodged my appeal with his superior and mine; but, had I waited for a reply, my father might have been dead before I came. I therefore had to choose my course, and at once decided on coming hither immediately. My companions are all my friends, and they give me good intelligence; but I must return to-morrow or the day after, lest this gentleman rejoin the regiment and find that I am absent."

"Oh! for pity's sake rejoin it at once," exclaimed *Annette*. "I tremble to think what might be the consequences if your absence were discovered. I cannot help supposing that Monsieur de Cajare is a somewhat heartless person, who would show but little compassion or consideration of any kind."

"In this instance," replied her companion, "he has certainly shown very little consideration; and I know not why he has acquired for himself in the service the reputation of a very artful and a very remorseless man. I must own myself, however," he added, frankly, "that I have never personally seen him say or do anything that should give rise to such an opinion. His demeanour, as far as I have seen it, has always been that of a finished gentleman and a man of refined taste."

*Mademoiselle de St. Morin* looked down thoughtfully, but for some time made no reply. At length, however, she answered, "I know too little of him to judge; but I should rather think that, in the ordinary course of life, people display what they will be on great occasions by small traits, and you may depend upon it that it is by these his fellow-officers have judged him."

"It may be so," replied her companion; "and, indeed, the only story that I ever heard of his doing anything to win himself such a reputation, referred to his having won a large sum from a young man at play. The loser had indeed lost all, and more than all, for he was forced to tell Cajare that he had not wherewithal to pay him; upon which the baron coolly took his sword and broke it across his knee, saying, what was perhaps true, but very cruel, that he who played for sums he could not pay was unworthy to wear the weapon of a man of honour. The unhappy man threw open the window, which was just above the course of the Rhone, and cast himself headlong out. Cajare sat still at the table, and called for more cards. So goes the story in the regiment; but I was not with it at the time, being then a lieutenant in the regiment of Picardy."

*Annette* gave a shudder as she listened, but made no reply, and her companion soon turned the conversation to other things. During the course of their ride she found the same highly-finished taste, the same knowledge of men, of countries, and of arts, which had given a charm to the conversation of the Baron de Cajare; but there was something superadded now; something that,

like the sunshine to a beautiful landscape, afforded the crowning grace to all the rest, brightened everything it shone upon, and called forth the beauties of the whole. It was that the heart spoke as well as the head; it was that there was feeling, as well as thought, in everything. Frankness and openness too, candour and bright sincerity, were in every word that he spoke; and though it was evident that he considered far less what was likely to please than Monsieur de Cajare, he did please without the effort, and won without the calculation. It was a very bright hour for Annette while she rode onward with him towards the chateau. At length, however, he drew in his rein, saying, with a deep sigh, "And now that I must leave you, forgive me if I repeat in thus parting from you, certainly for a long time, and perhaps forever, that I shall recollect you long and well; far too long ever to enjoy again the society with which I am going to mingle. I shall see nothing like you there; and yet I cannot find in my heart to regret that I have thus met you, even though I be destined thus to leave you; I mean no compliment, no exaggeration, but simple truth."

Annette blushed deeply, but yet she found courage to raise her eyes to his, saying in a tone gently reproachful, "Oh! Monsieur Nogent, how can I answer you? All I will say then is, pray go back to your regiment, and believe me that I will see your father constantly, and show him every care and tendance in my power, as much out of gratitude to you as out of affectionate regard for him."

She held out her hand to him once more; he pressed his lips upon it, and then, turning his horse, rode away.

Annette proceeded slowly to the chateau; but as she guided her horse through the gates, she looked back towards the hills and woodlands stretching in the direction of Fons. There was one spot where the shoulder of the nearest acclivity protruded bare through the wood, and commanded a view of the chateau and the ground round about it. On the summit of the hill, at the distance of about three quarters of a mile, Annette de St. Morin saw a single horseman. He was perfectly motionless, and was evidently gazing upon the path she had taken. It was not of course by features or by dress that Annette could distinguish at that distance who it was, but there was something within that told her at once the name of him who was there watching for the last look.

## CHAPTER XVI.

As Annette passed through the old hall, and was taking her way up the stairs which led to the saloon, she paused from time to time to reflect. Her thoughts were in confusion; the usual calm tranquillity did not reign in her bosom; her heart beat, and her mind would not fix upon any certain point. She was alarmed at her own sensations, and asked herself the cause of them.

One of the causes—for in this instance, as in all others, there were many causes combining to produce one effect—she soon discovered; but it was not the chief cause. She had tacitly promised not to reveal the fact, which she had discovered accidentally, of the presence of the young Baron de Nogent in that part of the country; and she fancied that it was the necessity of concealing anything from one to whom she had hitherto been all candour that thus agitated and bewildered her. She felt, however, that she had no right to sport with the fate of another; and though she was sure that the secret with the Count de Castelneau would be as safe as with herself, yet as he whom that secret chiefly affected had besought her to tell no one, she resolved to obey the injunction to the letter.

There was no difficulty in so doing, for her guardian had retired to take some repose during the heat of noon, which had lately become customary with him, and from which habit he had derived great benefit. When he returned to the saloon, he confined his questions entirely to the state of the good old nobleman whom Annette had visited, approved highly of her promise to see him again, and expressed a wish that she would go to Castel Nogent on the ensuing day.

Annette hesitated, however, and then replied that she would rather postpone her visit till the morning after. The count said let it be so; but he gave her an inquiring glance, asking himself why she, who was ever ready to fly to aid and comfort those who needed either assistance or consolation, should delay in the present instance the execution of her task of kindness. Annette saw him look at her gravely and the colour rose into

her cheek, for the motive of her conduct was not easily to be explained even to herself.

The fact is, she wished Ernest de Nogent to be gone back to his regiment before she renewed her visit to his father, and she feared that such might not be the case if she went to Castel Nogent the next day. Was his society disagreeable to her, then? Oh no! but the agitation which she felt—ay, and his evident admiration—and, even more than all, the new, strange pleasure which his conversation had afforded, frightened her young and inexperienced heart, and made her wish for thought, long, intense thought, ere she beheld him again. Timidity even flies from that which it loves; and it is no proof at all that the society of the young Baron de Nogent was not more pleasing to Mademoiselle de St. Morin than any other which she had yet met with in life, that she was unwilling to return to Castel Nogent till she was perfectly sure that he had left it. She coloured a little, then, more from the inexplicability of her own feelings than aught else; but the count took no notice except in his own heart, and Annette's journey was accordingly put off for a day.

In the mean time, what were the comments with her own spirit? What were the questions that she asked her own heart? What were the replies that her own heart made?

Alack and a well-a-day, reader, that we should confess it! But Annette was a woman; and with all a woman's feelings she retired to her chamber that night, thinking that she had the most anxious purpose of inquiring into her own sensations; of asking herself, in short, a thousand questions which nobody but herself could answer. Yet when she had entered her own chamber, and closed the door, and leaned her head upon her hand, and began the inquiry, she stopped at the very threshold of the secret chamber, and would go on no farther. She persuaded herself that there was nothing to inquire into; that she had been frightened about nothing; that it was all extremely natural and very right for her to like the conversation and be pleased with the society of a graceful and accomplished man who had saved her life; and though perhaps there were doubts at the very bottom of her heart of all this reasoning being correct, yet she suffered it to prevent her from inquiring farther, and let it convince her will, if it did not

convince her judgment. Have we not often seen a child stand on a summer day at the margin of the sunny sea, longing to bathe its limbs in the refreshing wave ? Have we not seen it cast off its garments and dip in the timid foot, draw back, hurry on its clothing again, and run away, as if in fear of those bright but untried waters ? Thus was it with Mademoiselle de St. Morin : the ocean of love was before her, and she trembled to adventure in.

Yet when, on the day appointed, she once more mounted her jennet to ride over to Castel Nogent, a soft sort of melancholy hung upon her, perhaps a feeling of regret, to think that Ernest de Nogent was not there, that she should not see him again, to use his own words, "certainly for a long time, perhaps forever." She rode more slowly and thoughtfully than she had formerly done ; she gazed round at the spot where she had parted from him ; she stopped her horse at the little fountain, and let him drink in the stream, and then, with a sigh, she shook the rein and went on upon her way.

When she arrived at Castel Nogent, she paused at the usual entrance, which, let it be remarked, was a side door, and not the great gates ; and, on ringing the bell, was immediately admitted by an old and faithful servant of the family.

"Oh, madam!" he said, "the baron is very much better ; I think your visit did him a great deal of good. If you will come into the library for a moment, he will be down stairs."

Annette followed to the library, which she found untenanted except by the sunshine that poured in at the window through the branches of a thin tree opposite, and, dancing upon the floor as the wind waved the boughs, gave an air of cheerful life to the apartment. It was a fine old room, well stored with curious volumes, and with old lances and other weapons of a remote period, forming trophies between the bookcases ; while here and there a casque, a corslet, or suit of complete armour belonging to some of the ancestors of the baron long dead, was seen on any vacant space upon the walls. The armour, it is true, was somewhat rusty, the books covered with the dust of time ; manifold motes danced in the beams of light, and everything showed that the servants in Castel Nogent were too

few in number to keep the house in that exact order which leaves the hand of Time nearly powerless.

There was an air of dryness, however, and cheerful antiquity about the library, which was pleasant to the eye ; and as it was a place well suited to contemplation, Annette's first act was to fall into a reverie, still standing in the middle of the floor, with one hand resting on the tall back of the chair which the old servant had placed for her, the other holding her riding whip dropping gracefully by her side, and her whole form and face presenting such an exquisite picture of Beauty in meditation, that one might well have wished to be a painter in order to draw her portrait as she there stood.

Her fancies must have been sweet—though they might have a tinge of melancholy in them—for the brow was as open as a bright summer's morning. But the mind must have been very intently occupied with some subject, for she remained during several minutes exactly in one position, without the slightest movement of any kind whatsoever.

On the left-hand side, close by the tall window, and some eight or ten feet from the spot where she had placed herself, was a small door leading into various apartments of the old chateau ; and at length, if her eyes had not been fixed so steadily upon the floor, she might have seen that door move slowly on its hinges. She did not see it, however, and the first thing that roused her was a shadow coming across the sunshine which found its way through the window.

Annette started and raised her eyes, a little confused, perhaps, at being found in so deep a fit of meditation ; but all the blood rushed up into her face in a moment when she beheld Ernest de Nogent himself standing before her.

“ Ah, Monsieur de Nogent !” she said, “ what has kept you here ? Indeed, I am very much afraid it may be dangerous to yourself.”

Ernest advanced and took her hand with a smile half gay, half melancholy.

“ Perhaps it may be dangerous,” he said, shaking his head. “ It may be dangerous to me in more respects than you mean ; but you must not ask me what has kept me here.”

“ Nay,” she answered, gayly, trying to laugh away the agitation which she certainly did feel, but withdraw-

ing her hand from his, "you are very mysterious; and I will not attempt to discover mysteries with which I have nothing to do."

"With this mystery I am afraid," he replied, in a low and thoughtful voice, "with this mystery I am afraid you have not a little to do."

Annette turned pale. "Indeed!" she said, with her heart beating violently. "I should be very sorry to suppose that were the case, for I do think it very imprudent for you to stay."

"Not so imprudent as you imagine, at least in the sense that you mean," replied Ernest; "but in another sense even more imprudent than you can believe."

Annette was very much agitated, for his manner spoke more, perhaps, than his words; but do not let it be thought that she was hypocritical if she tried to avoid a subject which produced so much emotion, and endeavoured to turn the conversation back to the danger which her companion ran in remaining there.

"But you told me," she said, "you yourself acknowledged to me that there was a very, very great risk in your coming hither at all, and still more in your staying, when every hour may produce a discovery of your absence."

"I have received letters from Paris since we last met," he said; "but the truth is, Mademoiselle de St. Morin, I am, I fear, very foolish, and I have to make two acknowledgments, each of which may appear very strange to you, and each of which may perhaps give you offence. I could not make up my mind to go without seeing you again. That is my first acknowledgment; the next is, that I am sometimes tempted to wish with my whole heart that I had never beheld you at all."

He had taken Annette's hand while he spoke, and he could not be insensible how it trembled in his own. The varying colour in her cheek, the downcast look of her bright eye, the quick and agitated breathing, might all encourage him to proceed; but, though such signs were not without their happy auguries, Ernest was both unwilling to agitate her too much, and too doubtful of success to press his suit vehemently. Before he had well concluded his sentence, Annette had sunk slow'y down into the chair beside her, and placed her left hand over her eyes.

"I agitate you," he continued, suffering her hand to be gently withdrawn from his. "Nay, nay, do not be so much moved. Listen to me, Mademoiselle de St. Morin, listen to me calmly. It is I who have cause to be agitated and apprehensive; but hark!" he continued, pausing abruptly. "Hark! there is the sound of wheels! What may this mean? It never happens but thus; and when we have but one precious moment on which depend our fate and happiness forever, we are prevented from using it by some impertinent trifle."

Annette looked up, pushed back the curls from her face, over which they had fallen in the agitation of the moment, wiped away something like a tear from her eyes, and then held out her hand again to Ernest de Nogent with a smile, which at that moment he would not have exchanged for an empire.

It might be a long task, reader, to explain all the little peculiarities in thought and feeling which made her act so differently from any other woman; and even when it was done you might not perhaps understand the whole clearly, if you have not comprehended the whole clearly already from the account that has been laid before you of her education and her natural disposition. She could hardly recover herself, however, and remove the traces of agitation from her countenance, ere the door of the library opened, and the old servant entered, with a face somewhat pale, announcing—the Baron de Cajare!

Ernest de Nogent drew himself up to his full height, and his left hand, by an impulse that he could not resist, fell upon the scabbard of his sword, as if to bring the hilt round towards the right. Annette had just time to give him one imploring look, saying, in a low voice, "For Heaven's sake, for your father's sake, for my sake, recollect yourself!" when the Baron de Cajare entered the room, and advanced with his usual calm and graceful demeanour towards the spot where Mademoiselle de St. Morin was seated. His lip was curled with the slightest possible sarcastic smile; but there was no frown upon his brow, and he bowed with the utmost politeness to Annette, saying, "This is an unexpected pleasure, mademoiselle; I trust that you have continued in health and happiness, notwithstanding your close attendance upon Monsieur de Castelneau."

Annette bowed her head; and hoping, from his man-

ner, that the errand of the Baron de Cajare was not such as she and Ernest himself believed it to be, she replied in polite terms, and at greater length than she otherwise would have done, stating that she herself was well, and that the Count de Castelneau was daily improving in health.

The baron listened to every word with the most courteous attention, and, ere she had concluded, the old Baron de Nogent himself was in the room. That gentleman instantly fixed his eyes with a frown upon the Baron de Cajare, though he grasped Annette's hand, as if to show her that he did not overlook her, and thanked her for her coming.

"To what cause, Monsieur de Cajare," he said, "am I to attribute the honour of this unexpected and unusual visit?"

"I hope you are better, my dear sir," replied the baron; "but I must not take to myself more credit than is my due. My visit is not to yourself, as my very slight acquaintance with you, Monsieur de Nogent, would not justify such intrusion; but it is to this good gentleman, your son, a captain in my regiment of horse, with whom I wish to speak a word or two upon business which we will not discuss in the presence of a lady."

"Mademoiselle de St. Morin will excuse me, sir," said the baron, "if I beg to know at once what is your purpose towards my son."

"I must beg an answer to a similar question too," added Ernest, "as I take it for granted, after our late correspondence, that you did not come here without an object of some importance, and I must choose my own measures accordingly."

"You will of course take no measures but those that are right and proper," replied the baron; "but, as you say that Mademoiselle de St. Morin will excuse us all, and as I am in some haste, I will merely beg leave to state, that I am under the disagreeable necessity of arresting my young friend here for disobedience of orders, and of sending him to trial for that offence."

"In short, sir," replied the old baron, "you sought to keep him from his father's sick-bed, and now you would seek to break that father's heart."

"A somewhat hard construction of a simple act of duty," replied Monsieur de Cajare; "nevertheless, my

dear sir, it must be accomplished ;" and he moved towards the window.

" Is it possible that your nature can be so hard and unfeeling !" said Annette. " Pray, pray, Monsieur de Cajare, have some consideration for the circumstances of the case."

" Alas ! my dear young lady," replied the baron, " war is a school that makes us very hard-hearted, I am afraid ; but, notwithstanding, I must call up the guard. Do not be frightened at their mustaches, dear lady," he added, with a sarcastic smile ; " the Parisian ladies tell me they are very harmless people."

While speaking he had approached the window, and now, putting out his head, he called, " Come up ! come up !"

Something that he saw below seemed to excite his surprise, however, for he still continued to look out, exclaiming, " Diantre ! what is the meaning of this ? Come up, I say !"

In the mean while, the baron, and his son, and Annette de St. Morin gazed for a moment or two with the silence of deep grief in each other's faces ; but no time was allowed them to speak ; for, even while Monsieur de Cajare was calling from the window, and ordering the guard a second time, with no very measured language, to come up, a gentleman dressed in black, and holding a paper in his hand, entered the room with a quiet and noiseless step, and advanced gravely but quickly, without saluting anybody.

The baron and his son stared at this new intruder with evident surprise ; but Annette instantly recognised the gentleman whom she had seen with two ladies near the fountain in the wood, and, why she knew not, but his presence seemed a relief to her. He took not the slightest notice of her on the present occasion, however ; and, passing the party in the middle of the room, proceeded to the window from which the Baron de Cajare was reiterating his order to come up, adding, in a fierce tone and with a somewhat ungentlemanlike interjection, " Why do you not obey ?"

So quiet was the step of the stranger who had so suddenly entered the room, that the baron was perfectly unconscious of his presence till he felt a heavy hand upon his shoulder, and heard the words, which were then somewhat fearful in France, "*De par le Roi !*"

Monsieur de Cajare instantly turned round, and when he beheld the person who stood beside him, turned deadly pale.

"Monsieur le Baron de Cajare," said the stranger, "in virtue of this *lettre-de-cachet*, I arrest you in the name of the king, and enjoin you to go with me."

"Where do you intend to take me, Monsieur Morin?" said the baron at once, without making the slightest sign of resistance.

"I intend to *send* you to the Bastile, sir," replied Pierre Morin. "I have some other business yet to do in this part of the world, so that I cannot have the honour of accompanying you to Paris. Everything is prepared for your comfortable journey; your own carriage is below, or I am much mistaken; but you made a little mistake just now, and took my archers for your own soldiers. May I ask you to walk down, sir, with all convenient speed?"

The Baron de Cajare looked at Annette and then at Ernest de Nogent, and for an instant an expression like that of a fiend came over his countenance. It was gone almost as soon as it appeared; the angry voice in which he called from the window was laid aside likewise, and not the slightest change of tone from that which he used in ordinary conversation was to be distinguished as he answered Pierre Morin, "Well, Monsieur Morin, of course I obey the king's commands; but I beg leave to say, my young friend here, Monsieur de Nogent, is under my arrest. I must give him into the care of my guard before—"

"You must do nothing *before* obeying the king's commands, sir," replied Pierre Morin; "besides, you need put yourself into no trouble regarding your soldiers, for I took the liberty of discharging them from attendance upon you. You must recollect, Monsieur le Baron, prisoners have no authority. As to Monsieur de Nogent, sir, I have also the king's orders—"

"To arrest him?" exclaimed the Baron de Cajare.

"I shall notify his majesty's commands affecting him to himself, sir," replied Pierre Morin, in a stern tone, "and not to you. Allow me to say we are wasting time. You have caused me to hurry down here, sir, from the capital, when, if you had attended to the hint sent to you by the Duke de Choiseul, you would have saved me much trouble, and might, perhaps, have saved

yourself from the Bastile ; but vengeance, sir, has no forethought, and his majesty has been made to understand the motives upon which you acted."

"He might at least have sent a gentleman to arrest me," said the Baron de Cajare with a curling lip.

Pierre Morin seemed not in the slightest degree offended, merely replying, "Sir, I obey his majesty's commands, and he expects you to do the same, be they notified to you by whom they may. But, at the same time, if it be any gratification to you to know that you are treated in the same manner as other persons, let me call to your mind that Pierre Morin, chief officer of the king's lieutenant-general of police, has arrested gentlemen whose ancestors were noble five centuries before your great-grandfather quitted the little bureau in the Rue Quinquempoix."

The colour came warm into the cheek of the Baron de Cajare as Pierre Morin in the quietest possible tone rebuked his insolent pride. The chief agent of the police of Paris, however, was not to be trifled with any more ; and, lifting up his finger as he saw Cajare about to reply, he said, in a tone of command, "Monsieur le Baron de Cajare, obey the king's commands ! Descend the staircase, take your place in the carriage which is waiting for you, and surrender yourself at the royal prison of the Bastile without another word, or I will report your contumacy to his majesty !"

The baron's haughty air instantly sunk ; and, without taking notice of any one, without bow or word of adieu, he crossed the room and descended to the hall. Pierre Morin followed ; but before he did so he turned towards Ernest de Nogent, saying, "Monsieur de Nogent, you will be good enough to remain here till I come back ;" and then, proceeding with his quick, noiseless step down the stairs, he saw the Baron de Cajare into his carriage, and two guards take their seats in the vehicle beside him.

While all these events had been taking place, a number of people had gathered together in the court of the chateau, some from the neighbouring hamlet, some from the woods where they had been destroying the wolves ; and manifold were the inquiries of "What is the matter ? what is the matter ?"

At length the inquiry was pronounced close to Pierre Morin, who stood on the steps before the great gateway,

where the carriage had been drawn up. As soon as he heard it, he turned round to those who spoke, and pronounced the magical words, "*Enlèvement de police*," an arrest by the police; and at the sound the very boldest drew three or four steps back, with countenances far paler than they had been before.

Ay, the very men who not many years afterward marched to Paris, and aided to dye the streets of the capital with the blood of many of the best, the bravest, and the noblest in the land, now drew back in terror at the very name of that redoubtable police, whose whole real power, like almost every power on earth, was derived from the fears of those upon whom it was exercised. The carriage rolled rapidly away after Pierre Morin had handed the papers which he held to one of the soldiers in the inside, and he himself turned his steps again into the mansion of Monsieur de Nogent.

In the mean while, those whom he had left behind in the library of the chateau had continued gazing upon each other with some degree of painful expectation; but Annette recollected the kind, nay, the affectionate manner in which the very man who seemed to possess such power had spoken to her in the forest, and the moment Pierre Morin again appeared she advanced towards him, saying, "Let me speak with Monsieur Morin for a moment."

"Oh, sir!" she said, in a low voice, as soon as she was near enough to speak without her words being overheard, "when last I saw you, you expressed yourself kindly and tenderly towards me; let me beseech you to spare Monsieur de Nogent as far as it be possible. Pray remember, sir, he only came hither to see his father, who was then supposed to be dying; and, though that father is better, yet have some consideration for him too."

Pierre Morin heard her in silence, looking in her face with a smile of kindly meaning.

"My dear young lady," he said, at length, "you mistake the whole business; I have no power in this matter; I am a mere instrument. But do not be frightened; I have nothing to say to Monsieur de Nogent which should pain him or alarm you."

"Sir," he continued, turning to Ernest, "this young lady has been pleading for you, as if I had some authority of my own in this business; but you very well know

I am a mere agent, as I have just told her. I must therefore inform you that his majesty commands you to return to your regiment immediately. He has directed me to say that, as far as he is concerned, he pardons you, in consideration of your father's state of health. The general under whose command you serve will reprimand you for being absent without leave, should he think it necessary. The cause of such an humble individual as myself being commanded to convey this message to you, rather than a military officer, is simply that I was ordered down hither in haste to arrest the Baron de Cajare, whose offence against his majesty has been in some degree mixed up with the question of your absence without leave. You will understand, sir, that the king's order is peremptory that you depart for your regiment instantly. I will now take my leave."

It was in vain the Baron de Nogent and his son pressed Pierre Morin to take some refreshment before he went ; he retired at once, taking leave of Annette as he passed, and whispering a single brief sentence in her ear.

The words which Pierre Morin addressed to Annette were merely these : " Do not be surprised or alarmed at anything you may hear when you return home." But, as always happens, imagination instantly attached the idea of coming evil to the injunction not to fear, and Annette's fancy suggested that some accident or misfortune must have befallen the Count de Castelfeau during her absence. She had now learned to feel that there were other persons in the world who might be loved as well as himself, but that did not make her love him differently or less than before ; and she hastened to quit her two companions, notwithstanding all the interest which she had learned to take in them, in order to return to him towards whom all the affections of her heart had been given from infancy with a high, pure, filial love.

The baron and Ernest de Nogent would fain have detained her, at least for a short time ; but she would not stay, saying, with a smile, that, as she had seen all their enemies frustrated, and even sickness put to flight, her errand was over, and she must hasten back.

Ernest led her down to her horse, and though there was many a thing in his heart that he would fain have found a moment to utter, yet, from the impossibility of

saying all in so short a space as that which was now afforded him, he remained silent till they reached the bottom of the staircase. There, however, he paused, and detained her for an instant, asking, with a look of entreaty, " May I not accompany you on your ride ? "

" No, no, indeed !" replied Annette. " Pray remember the commands you have received, and return to your regiment without the delay even of an hour."

" I will," he answered, " I will ; but will you not say one word to comfort and console me, in thus parting from all I hold dear, for a time the limits of which I know not ? "

" What can I say ? " rejoined Annette. " What can I say ? All I can do is," she added—and, as the spot where they stood was shadowed by a large buttress which crossed the window, the blush with which her words were accompanied could hardly be seen—" all I can do is to beg you to be careful and prudent for the sake of those here—of all who love and esteem you. You have run so great a risk already, that I cannot but tremble to think of what might be the consequence of any other act of rashness ; and now, go ! pray go quickly. Fare you well ! "

Thus saying, she turned towards the door ; but Ernest detained her for one moment longer, to press his lips again and again upon her hand. Again he felt that it trembled in his own ; and her agitation, coupled with the words that he spoke, gave an assurance to his heart which was not a little consoling to him.

## CHAPTER XVII.

With her eyes bent down towards her saddle-bow, and her cheek somewhat glowing, Annette departed, proceeding at a quick pace up the hill upon the slope of which the chateau of Castel Nogent was built. When she had passed the acclivity, however, she tightened the rein and suffered the horse to go on at a walk, thinking deeply over all that had occurred. Again and again she asked her heart, "What are these sensations that I feel towards Ernest de Nogent? Is this love?"

She could no longer conceal from herself that he was not to her the same as other men; but she would not believe—or perhaps I should say, she would not admit—that it could be love which she felt. The time was so short, their meetings so few, that she could not, she would not, allow that it could be love. But yet Annette was not only now convinced that she did feel different sensations towards the young Lord of Castel Nogent from those which she had ever experienced before towards any human being, but, upon reflection, she found that her whole conduct had been such as to give him hope and encouragement; and she blushed as if a thousand eyes had been upon her at the presence of that conviction in her heart.

We have shown that Annette de St. Morin had been tempted, a night or two before, to shut her eyes to the consideration of her *own feelings*, and to shrink from the examination of the new passion which was insidiously taking possession of her heart; but, though she might do this, Annette had been taught from her earliest days never so to shrink from the examination of her own conduct, never so to shut her eyes to the result of any action that she had actually done; and she now carefully and thoughtfully inquired to what she had plighted and pledged herself by her demeanour towards Ernest de Nogent. It might, indeed, be a question whether she examined fairly, because Inclination, in all our dealings with our own heart, is at the ear of the judge; and perhaps Annette did give a little more weight to every word she had spoken, to every look and gesture

favourable to Ernest, than she would have done had he been less agreeable to her. The general result, however, was right ; it was, that she had given him a degree of encouragement which she could never retract with honour, and, as a consequence of that very encouragement, she felt herself bound to tell all that had passed, even including the thoughts and feelings of her own mind and heart, to the person who had been to her, she herself said, more than a father.

The anticipation of doing so, however, agitated and troubled her far more than she could have believed anything of the kind would do. How to begin the tale she knew not ; how to go on with it was equally perplexing ; how to express what were her feelings, what were her thoughts, made the colour rise in her cheek, and her eyes sink to the ground even while she asked herself the question.

Her horse went now merely at a walk, but she urged him not on either by voice or whip ; and, so far from hastening homeward, she took a somewhat longer path through the woods, not remarking that clouds had gathered in the sky while she had remained at Castel Nogent, and that the sultry heat of the air portended the coming of a storm. So it was, however. Over the tops of the tall trees might be seen gathering dull leaden masses of dense vapour, and the breath of the air had not the balminess of the preceding days, but was both sultry and oppressive in the highest degree. It could not be called fiery, like the gale that blows over the sands of Egypt, but it felt moist, though hot and difficult to breathe, as if it were borne from the depths of fens and morasses, exhaling deadly vapours under the rays of an ardent sun. Still, between the hard edges of the heavy clouds, the blue sky appeared, especially towards the zenith, where the great orb of day continued pouring on his flood of sovereign splendour, as if at once careless and unconscious of all the storms and tempests which might vex the earth below. The hum of the insect world, which had been busy in the morning, was now still ; the voice of the birds, which had resounded through the woods and the valleys, was now reduced to short notes, begun, perhaps, in gladness of heart, but terminated apparently in apprehension of some coming evil.

To all these warnings, however, Annette was blind,

so busy was she in the world of her own heart ; and the only external thing that caught her attention was the fretfulness of her horse. Attributing it to thirst from heat and exercise, she guided the animal to the bank of the stream ; and, casting down the rein upon his neck, she let him drink, gazing with apparent interest upon the reflection of her beautiful jennet's head in the water, but, truth, seeing nothing but the images within her own breast. She was thus sitting calmly, with her hands resting on her knee, her head bent down, and her eyes fixed upon the clear smooth stream, when suddenly a flash of intense brightness blazed over the glistening expanse of water, followed instantly by a loud clap of thunder which made the woods echo around. The horse threw its head suddenly back from the river, reared, plunged, and darted forward ; and before Annette could make any effort to save herself, she was cast headlong into the stream.

The water was not very deep, and the servants flew in an instant to the assistance of one whom the whole household loved ; but still, when they drew her forth from the stream, she was to all appearance lifeless. With the tears and loud lamentations in which the excitable people of the south of France indulge on all occasions of grief, the servants bore the form of Annette on towards the chateau ; but, when they arrived there, they found nothing but faces of bustle and anxiety. Horses and postillions were standing in the courtyard ; good old Donnine was giving manifold orders regarding various packages of ladies' gear which other servants were bringing down ; and the great family coach, as well as the old *chaise de poste*, were drawn out into the principal courtyard. All betokened preparations for an immediate journey ; but all this bustle was turned instantly into silent consternation as poor Annette was carried into the chateau. They bore her forward into a large saloon on the ground floor ; but, as they stretched her on one of the long, hard sofas of that day, some signs of returning animation began to show themselves. Her beautiful hands closed with a convulsive motion as if she felt pain, and it became clear that life was not extinct.

The sounds of lamentation and dismay which had followed Mademoiselle de St. Morin into the house soon reached the ears of the Count de Castelneau ; and, after a vain inquiry, he came down himself, followed by his two medical attendants, who happened at the moment to be with him.

To behold her he loved best on earth lying there, pale as a withered flower, her beautiful dark hair fallen about her face and neck, her eyes closed, her lips bloodless, might well affect any man deeply, and doubtless it greatly moved the Count de Castelnau; but it was not such sights or such events that produced those attacks of illness under which he had lately suffered. His lip quivered a little, the gaze of his eye grew more intense, anxious, and the muscles of the brow contracted in a certain degree; but he had every command over himself, and asked in a clear, calm voice, "How did this happen?"

The tale was soon told; but, even as it was telling, the surgeon, who was luckily present, exclaimed, "She is not dead;" and, drawing forth his lancet, he proceeded to employ such means as he thought necessary to recall poor Annette to consciousness. At first the blood flowed with difficulty, but soon it came in a fuller stream, and in a few moments she opened her eyes faintly, and then closed them again, murmuring an indistinct word or two with her lips. It were tedious to tell all that was done to restore her to recollection; but let it suffice that in the space of about three quarters of an hour, Mademoiselle de St. Morin, who was suffering, not from the temporary suspension of animation produced by immersion in the water, but from the stunning effects of her fall, completely recovered her speech and consciousness, and, holding out her hand to Monsieur de Castelnau, she said, "Do not fear! Do not fear, my dear father! I am not much hurt—I am better now."

A glistening drop came into the count's eyes; but he replied tranquilly, "Thank God! my Annette, you are not much hurt. These gentlemen assure me that such is the case; but be composed for a little while, and do not speak yourself, for I have some news to give you. I will leave you for a few minutes, and return to tell you more."

The count was gone about half an hour, and, when he did come back, he found Annette apparently much recovered, though she was, in truth, severely bruised and in considerable pain.

"What are the tidings, my dear father?" she asked, as he sat down again beside her. "They are no evil tidings, I hope?"

"No! oh, no!" replied the count; "do not alarm

yourself, my Annette ; but I fear I cannot remain to witness your recovery, dear child. The king has sent me an order to come to Paris without an instant's delay. The cause assigned for this command is much suspicion of disaffection, in consequence of my long absence from the capital. If this be the real cause, such suspicions [REDACTED] be cleared away in an hour."

[REDACTED] he spoke the count fell into deep thought, and remained with his eyes fixed upon the ground for several moments ; while Annette gazed up in his face with an eager and inquiring look, as if seeking to scan her guardian's feelings, and gather more information than his words afforded. No one, perhaps, was so well qualified to learn from the countenance of Monsieur de Castelnau what was passing in his heart as Annette de St. Morin ; but even to her his face was a very unreadable book on most occasions. In the present instance, however, she was right in some degree ; and she said, " You doubt whether that suspicion be the real cause or not ? But you must not go without me. I can go very well. I am quite recovered now. I can go quite well."

The count bent down his head and kissed her brow, saying, " I am afraid, my dear Annette, that I am very selfish with regard to you, and that my love for your society has but too often prevented me from giving you the advantage of mingling in the world as much as you ought to do ; but yet, my dear child, I am not so basely selfish as to rob you of health, perhaps of life, for any comfort or consolation whatsoever. It is quite impossible that you should go with me in your present state ; equally impossible, I grieve to say, that I should stay till you are better. These gentlemen of art, however, inform me that, if you remain tranquil here, I need be under no apprehension for your health. One of them I must take with me, as it might be dangerous for me to travel without assistance. Monsieur Merle, however, will see you every day ; and let me know by letter what is the exact state of my dear child's health. I, in return, will write to you as soon as I reach Paris, and you shall speedily hear both how I am, and what is the real cause of this sudden call. It is strange that, after eighteen years' absence, I should have any enemy so pertinacious as to inspire suspicions of my conduct in the mind of the king ! "

" You do not think," said Annette, in a low voice, and

with a glance towards the other persons who were in the room, which made the count bend down his ear to listen, "you do not think that the Baron de Cajare can have anything to do with this ?"

The count started, exclaiming, "What makes you think so ?"

The colour came slightly into Annette's cheek and replied, "I have scarcely any reason ; but I recollect one day said, when he was speaking in a way which surprised and pained me, that means might be easily found of forcing you out of this old chateau to what he called the intellectual pleasures of the capital."

The slight cloud which hung upon the count's brow cleared away in a moment. "Ha ! Monsieur de Cajare !" he said, "is it so ? You are doubtless right, my Annette. I have known men sent to the Bastile at the instigation of intriguing scoundrels, for a much less object than that which Monsieur de Cajare has in view. He shall find himself mistaken, however."

"He has done so already," replied Annette, "for he was down at Castel Nogent this morning, and seemed to think he had everything and everybody in his power ; but, in the midst of it all, an agent of police came in, arrested him, and sent him to the Bastile."

"Indeed !" said the count, "indeed ! But what more, my Annette ? you seem to have more to say."

"I must forbid it to be said now, I am afraid," said the physician, advancing to Annette's side ; "it is neither fit for you, count, nor for Mademoiselle de St. Morin. Remember, my dear sir, you have still some business of rather an agitating nature to go through."

"Agitating !" said the count ; "you do not suppose that talking of, or making arrangements for, the only one event that is certain in human life—I mean death—can have anything agitating in it to me ? My dear Annette," he went on, "about to take a long journey, and having scarcely recovered from a severe fit of illness, I have thought it right once more to make my will in form. I have also laid out a large portion of your fortune in the purchase of the small lordship of St. Aubin on the Lot. You will take my word for it, my dear child, that it was an advantageous purchase ; the deeds, properly made out in your name, are in the hands of my notary up stairs, but you must sign a paper signifying your consent to my thus employing your money on your

behalf. As this good man," he added, pointing to Monsieur Merle, "shakes his head at this conversation, I will again leave you for a while, and then come back to you for a moment before I depart."

Monsieur de Castelneau was absent for a greater length of time than before, and he then returned with his own notary and another member of the law. They ~~had~~ with them various deeds and papers, which they presented to Annette, and explained to her as the titles to the estate of St. Aubin, which her guardian was said to have purchased with money belonging to her.

The sum did indeed so far belong to her—although it proceeded from a moiety of his own revenues, which he had laid by ever since he had succeeded to the title of the Count de Castelneau—that he had always called it to himself Annette's portion; and he had thus ~~sur~~ered it to accumulate, in remembrance of the promise he had made, to give her a dowry according to the rank in which he brought her up. The laws of France, however, have always intermeddled with the disposal of private property in a manner ever vexatious, and often most inconvenient; and, in order to avoid all the difficulties which might have thus occurred, the Count of Castelneau had been obliged to have recourse to this method of purchasing property for Annette, which she could not be deprived of, let what might become of any other sum which he left to her by his will.

The formal part of the business was soon over; the notaries took the deeds away with them, but gave her an acknowledgment that they held them for her use; and in a minute after one of the servants came to inform the count that mademoiselle's clothes had been removed from the carriage, and that all was ready for his own departure.

"I must now bid you farewell, my Annette," replied the count; "but, since I have heard what you had to tell me regarding Monsieur de Cajare, I go with a mind at ease. Previously to your return, my poor girl, I had fondly hoped that you would be the companion of my journey, and good Donnine had hustled herself for your departure. That would have been exactly what Monsieur de Cajare desired, no doubt; but this accident disappoints him as well as me, and I now leave you mistress of Castelneau till my return. I have but one injunction to give you, my Annette, which is, to be care-

ful of yourself. You will be kind to all others, I know; but I shall be very, very anxious regarding you, for these two sad dangers that have befallen you have shaken my confidence in your safety. Be careful, therefore, my Annette, and let me hear from you as soon as it is possible."

Thus saying, he left her, and a few unwonted tears rose in the fair girl's eyes; for, though her nature was not an apprehensive one, and experience had not yet taught her the instability of every earthly thing, yet she could not part from the friend and guardian of her infancy and youth without a feeling of loneliness, ay, and of fear, not lest any evil should fall upon herself, but lest the fatigues of the way, or the intrigues of evil men at court, might impair his health, and affect his happiness or life.

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## CHAPTER XVIII.

THOUGH it may soon be our duty to follow the course of some of our other characters, to inquire into the proceedings of Monsieur de Cajare, to accompany Ernest de Nogent on his journey, or to trace the adventures of Monsieur de Castleneau, we must for the present dwell with Annette in the old chateau, and speak of some events which took place within a very short time after the departure of the count himself. As we have said, poor Annette felt sad and lonely; and, though good Donnine did her best to sooth and to console her, and though the well-regulated mind of the young lady herself taught her that to give way to apprehension was neither wise nor right, and that it was a duty to amuse her mind by every means in her power, yet the next two or three hours were very heavy to her, and she experienced, though but in a slight degree, that desolation of heart which every one must have felt still more deeply who has lost a dear and valued friend forever. As the evening came on, also, the effects of her fall were more sensibly felt; she became somewhat feverish towards night, and the physician, who returned to see her, gave her some drugs to allay the pain and tranquillize her nerves, and directed her immediately to retire to rest.

Although it was not yet dark, she did as he directed, and left the saloon vacant. The evening sun streamed into it cheerfully, and traced a natural dial on the floor, marking the hours till the ray faded. The light grew more and more dim in the chamber ; the black oak carving of the ceilings were lost in the obscurity ; and the moon began to show herself in the heavens, triumphing, yet but timidly, in the absence of her great and glorious rival of the day.

It was at that hour and moment that the door of the saloon opened quietly, and a lady entered, leaning on the arm of a gentleman in dark clothing. No servant preceded them, no attendant followed ; and the lady, sinking into one of the large armchairs, covered her eyes with her hands, murmuring, "Am I here once more ?"

For several minutes she remained evidently weeping, but in silence and without violence : they seemed the tears of memory, and flowed by in the same solemn silence with which all the objects of the past march in review before the eye of conscience. The gentleman did not seat himself, but stood by her side uncovered ; and, after a few minutes, he walked forward to the window, and gazed out towards the west, where a faint greenish film of light, the last effort of day, still hung like a curtain before the stars.

"I fear, madam," he said, at length, returning to the lady's side, "I fear, madam, that, if we do not proceed quickly, we shall lose the little light that remains, and be obliged to call some of the men to bring a lamp, which may be unpleasant."

"I am ready, my good friend, I am ready," she replied ; "but you may well imagine what are the feelings with which I behold all these well-remembered scenes, where the bubble of happiness first rose upon the stream of my life, and then burst and passed away forever. But come ! I could guide you in the dark ; for, if the burning of the heart could communicate its intense fires to the earthly frame, every one of my footsteps, when last I trod the way from that chamber to this, must have been printed indelibly on the floor. Come, come, we shall soon find the place where my heart was broken."

Thus saying, she led the way across the room to a smaller door than that by which she had entered, and on the opposite side. Taking her way through it, she proceeded by a corridor to the end of that wing of the

chateau, and then passed the door of Annette's bed-chamber to the extreme west, where one of the large towers contained within itself two or three of the best rooms in the castle. The door which there ended the corridor was locked ; but the gentleman who was with her had a number of keys in his hand, and, with extraordinary ease and precision, he selected the one which the keyhole required, applied it, and gave her entrance.

Those were days in which window-shutters to the higher rooms of a country house were almost unknown, and, consequently, in the apartments they now entered, which looked full towards the spot where the sun had set not a half an hour before, the light was much more strong than at the opposite side of the building. Even here it was very faint, but there was still enough to guide the lady across the antechamber to the door of the room beyond. She laid her hand upon the lock, but paused for a moment as if under the influence of some strong emotion ; and then, conquering her irresolution, she threw open the door, disclosing a bedroom fitted up with great taste and luxury : a toilet-table festooned with velvet and gold ; a bed with hangings of the same rich materials ; tall mirrors in beautiful frames ; and in the centre panel of the wainscot, on the opposite side of the room, a full-length portrait of a gentleman in a military dress, apparently about to mount his horse. One foot was in the stirrup, one hand was upon the mane ; and while the countenance was turned so as to look full into the room, the other hand, by the painter's skill, appeared to stretch forth from the canvass, and wave a hat and plume as if bidding adieu to the spectators.

There was an air of joy, and youth, and bright hilarity in the whole figure and countenance, which not even the dim twilight of that hour could altogether conceal, and upon it fixed the lady's eyes the moment she opened the door. She pressed her hand upon her heart ; looked around the room with an expression almost of fear, and then, advancing with a quick step, gazed earnestly upon the portrait, till, sinking on her knees before it, she murmured a short prayer. She remained there scarcely for a minute ; but ere she rose, many a tear bedewed the spot where she knelt, and it was with difficulty she could restrain them from flowing for some time afterward.

Advancing into a small dressing-room beyond, and

approaching the huge mantelpiece of black oak, she said, laying her hand upon a large carved moulding, "It is here;" and she ran her hand along it more than once, seeming to press upon the various flowers and figures with which it was ornamented. As she did so she began to tremble, saying, "Some one must have opened it since, or else they must have discovered and closed it altogether. It used to open with a touch."

"Let me try," said the gentleman who was with her; "it may well have got rusty in twenty years."

"That rose!" said the lady, "that rose! I am sure it was that or the one next to it."

Her companion advanced and pressed upon the spot in the cornice which she pointed out. It instantly gave way under his stronger hand; the moulding fell forward like the front of some ancient scrutoire, and at the same moment a parchment rolled out and dropped at the lady's feet. She instantly picked it up and pressed it to her heart, and then turning to the names that were signed at the end, endeavoured to read them, but in vain.

"It matters not," she said, "it matters not! This is the contract. There is nothing else there; let us be gone."

"It is better to be quite sure," replied her companion; and, putting his hand into the cavity from which the parchment had fallen, he speedily produced another, though very much smaller in size.

"Here is another deed," he said; "most likely the procuration of some relation."

"True," she answered, "true; I had forgotten that; but it is not of as much consequence as the other. Now let us go."

"You had better do so, madam," replied her companion, "for the carriage will carry you to Figeac speedily. I must remain, however, and see that these men do their duty, though the search is all nonsense, and they will find nothing."

"I suppose so," answered the lady; "but how happens it, I wonder, that such suspicion should arise without a cause?"

"Some enemy!" replied the gentleman. "Unhappily, a minister's ears are always open to every accusation. To be accused is often as bad as to be criminal; and the Count de Castelneau may well think himself lucky to have nothing worse to undergo than a mere

journey to Paris, if, as I believe, some powerful enemy has accused him."

"That enemy has been my best friend," replied the lady; "but I will hasten away now, and wait for you at Figeac."

Thus saying, she retired from the dressing-room, and again paused before the picture in the other chamber; but, as time acts upon the memories of objects past, the evening light had acted upon that portrait. When she had before seen it, the form, the features, the dress were all distinct, though the colouring was somewhat gray and cold; now all was confused and obscure; there was neither hue nor exact form left, and the vague figure of a man mounting his horse was traced more by the aid of recollection than the eye.

The lady passed on; and the gentleman who was with her, taking care to close every door behind them, and to remove all trace of their visit, followed her quickly, and accompanied her through the same corridors and rooms which they had passed before, down the great staircase into the courtyard. A number of men were drawn up there in deep silence at a short distance from a carriage, to which were attached four horses; and at some distance beyond appeared a number of the servants of the Count de Castelneau. The latter, however, seemed either stupified or overawed; for they remained motionless and unconcerned while the stranger handed the lady into the vehicle. As he was about to retire from the door of the carriage, she bent forward and said, "I am sure you would suffer me to see her if it were possible."

"It is wholly impossible, madam," he answered, "without ruin to all;" and, bowing low, he retired into the château.

During the greater part of that night lights were seen in the various parts of the building, and the servants of the Count de Castelneau remained watching with some anxiety proceedings which caused them great apprehension, but which they could not prevent. Strange to say, however, the whole passed with so much quietness and silence, that neither Annette, nor her maid, who slept in a neighbouring chamber, nor old Donnine, who, ever since the young lady had been a child, claimed a room as close to that of Mademoiselle de St. Morin as possible, was ever awakened.

Early on the following day, when Donnine, who retained all the matutinal habits of her youth, rose and proceeded to resume the cares of the household which she superintended, the whole bevy of maidens under her sage charge and governance assailed her at once with accounts of the domiciliary visit which had been paid to the chateau by a large body of police. They had gone through all the count's apartments, she was told ; had examined his papers, and opened all his cabinets and drawers—at least so the servants inferred ; for, be it remarked, they were themselves excluded from the chambers where the police were pursuing their avocations, except when some information or assistance was necessary. They moreover told Donnine that the gentleman who commanded the police had taken particular pains not to make any noise or disturbance, and had said that there was no use of searching Mademoiselle de St. Morin's apartments, or waking her from her sleep. On receiving this information, Donnine consulted with herself whether she should or should not inform her young lady of what had occurred, and she determined not to do so till Annette had risen and breakfasted.

All her wise precautions were, however, in vain ; for Annette's maid, who, among other good qualities, possessed the peculiar faculty of the parrot and the magpie, repeating like them everything that she heard, caught some ten words of the intelligence as she leaned over the stairs, and, running instantly into Annette's room, woke her with the tidings that the house had been visited by the police, who had carried off every paper they could find. With the common babble, in short, of persons in her situation, she told all that she knew, and a great deal more ; and the consequence was, that Annette, who was still suffering considerably from the effects of her fall, and who would certainly not have risen that day had it not been for some extraordinary cause, began to dress herself immediately, and was on the eve of going down, when Donnine appeared to inquire how she had passed the night.

Without delay, Annette proceeded through the chambers which had been visited during the night, and found that the papers had not been carried away, though they had been examined. One scrutoire and one desk she found closed by a double seal connected by a thick piece of parchment ; and after considering for some moments

what this appearance might indicate, and what should be her own conduct, she thought that the best plan of proceeding would be to write immediately to the Baron de Nogent, asking advice from his better experience. She accordingly did so, and at the same time despatched a letter by a special courier to the Count de Castelneau, hoping that information of what had taken place might reach him before he quitted Limoges.

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### CHAPTER XIX.

THE Count de Castelneau leaned back in his carriage and thought of Annette, while the slow wheels, at the rate of about five miles an hour, rolled him onward towards Paris. Perhaps never had he known the tediousness of life before, for the thoughts of an active and busy mind had always furnished sufficient employment for each leisure moment; but now he had where-withal to measure the minutes, though not to occupy them, and each mile that he was borne away from the society which he loved best seemed but to increase the slowness of Time's tardy flight. There was nothing on the road to amuse or interest him: he had seen every tree and every stone, in the course of the first twenty miles, a hundred times before; and the physician, who sat beside him in the carriage, after having made a vain attempt to converse upon indifferent topics, had sunk back into the corner, where he now lay pillow'd on the soft bosom of sleep.

The count then communed with himself, and the chief subject of thought was Annette de St. Morin. He asked himself what were his real feelings, his own most secret wishes and purposes. He was a great doubter of his own heart. He knew it—that sad, frail, wily thing, the human heart—he knew it, by experience, to be the most deceitful of all things; and, alas! still worse, more deceitful to those who trust it than to any others. He asked himself whether, were Annette herself willing to give him her hand, he would really seek to wed her. He answered "No!" boldly, almost indignantly. Such a purpose, such a wish, he thought, had never entered

his mind. Not to lose her society was all that he desired. But the next question was, how her constant companionship was to be preserved without wedding her. Could he keep her who was so formed for domestic happiness lingering out her days almost in solitude? Could he condescend to watch her, lest her heart should choose for itself, to exclude all who might please, attract, or win her? Would it be wise? would it be just? Oh, no! his own heart forbade the thought at once; but, then, with what art it suggested again that the only means of gaining both objects, of retaining Annette forever near him, and yet suffering her to know all the blessings of domestic life, and all the high pleasures of well-chosen society, was to make her his own by the bond of marriage. She had never yet, he thought, seen any one to love but himself. All her first affections were his: those affections were evidently like the love of a daughter to a father, it was true; but might they not easily be changed into warmer and tenderer feelings? As he reflected upon it, however, he shrunk from the idea; he thought, almost with horror, of losing the fond name of father which she gave him, even to assume that of husband; and he covered his eyes with his hand, and turned away his mind from the subject.

"I will think of it no more," he said; but, alas! to have thought of it at all was a step gained by the adversary, from which he was only to be driven by pain and sorrow. The count kept his resolution for the time, however; turned his mind to other things, asking himself a thousand questions regarding his sudden call to Paris; and busied his imagination in inquiring who had really laid the charge against him, and what that charge actually was. There was a vague apprehension presented itself from time to time, a spectre rising from the shadowy night of the past, and flitting across his eyes, faint and indistinct, yet dark and horrible; but he would not, he dared not, suffer that spectre to come near. He drove it away with a scoff while it was yet afar; though, had he suffered it to approach close to his eyes, it would have overpowered him altogether. He concluded, with Annette—he chose to conclude that his accuser must be the Baron de Cajare; that the object was to bring his fair ward to Paris, and the charge some of those idle accusations which the French government

in that day was always very willing to employ, in order to force the provincial nobles into the capital.

At length the carriage stopped in order that the horses might be changed at a little inn and posthouse between Cahors and Limoges, which he had known well in former years, and where, as it was a pleasant spot in a beautiful country, he had spent sometimes weeks together. The hostess had been a very gay and pretty woman, a year or two younger than himself; and with her, in his early days of levity, he had often indulged in many an idle and over-familiar jest. It was now night; the country round he could not see; but there came to the side of the carriage an old woman, bearing the light, and courtesying low to the strange gentleman as she announced herself as the post-mistress.

The count gazed at her attentively. She was the same gay personage he had formerly known, but oh, how changed! She had sunk, in those twenty or two-and-twenty years, into a coarse and withered old dame. The freshness of the cheek, the neat waist, the smart foot and ankle, were all gone. Much exposure and work, as well as some care and anxiety, had left her brown and shrivelled, and not a trace of beauty or of youth remained.

Monsieur de Castelneau gazed and felt how time had passed; and as the idea he had entertained of wedding Annette came up for an instant before his mind, he applied the homily to his own heart, and a sneering smile came upon his lip at the thought of his own weakness.

It rarely happens, when we are tempted to evil thoughts or evil deeds, that some warning is not whispered in our ear, that some obstacle is not thrown in our way. It is only, in short, when our heart takes part with the temptation that we fall, and then fall without palliation. The count, however, was eager to prevent his mind from yielding to what he felt was wrong, and he made the best use of the little incident which had occurred. He looked out at the post-mistress; she did not know him in the least. He spoke to her for a moment or two; she did not even recognise his voice.

“I am as much changed as she is,” he said to himself. “And when I can imagine that ardent youth in its first freshness can feel passion for age like this, then I may expect that Annette may love me as a wife should love her husband.” He cast the idea once more from him as

a thing vain and absurd, and made the postillions drive on as quickly as possible.

The journey of that day, however, was of course short, from the lateness of the hour at which the count had taken his departure; but the act of travelling seemed rather to have done him good than otherwise. He slept better than he had done for many nights previous, and woke early the following day prepared to pursue his way. His valet appeared to dress him as soon as he was up and had performed his devotions; and, as the man bustled about the room, first bringing one article to his master and then another, he seemed struck with something which appeared upon the table, and handed the count a note, asking him if he had seen it.

Monsieur de Castelneau took it from his hand, looked at the seal, then, with a contracted brow and somewhat wild expression of countenance, gazed in the man's face, and then, as if with a great effort, tore open the note.

It contained but three words, "Go in peace!" but these words seemed to take a load off the count's mind, and he asked eagerly who had placed the note upon his table. All his own servants and all the servants of the inn denied, with every appearance of honesty, that they had done anything of the kind; and the count was obliged to proceed on his way without any farther information concerning the event.

At Limoges, Monsieur de Castelneau received Annette's letter, informing him of the visit of the police, and the search for papers which had been made at the chateau. These tidings, though they led him to suppose that the charge was somewhat serious, only made him smile, as he well knew that nothing could be found at Castelneau which could show him to be implicated in any designs against the government. He answered Annette's letter before he set out, telling her how confident he was in his own innocence, and giving her the still better intelligence of his hourly improving health, and of the great benefit which the act of travelling seemed to produce. He then hastened on to Paris; and we shall not pause on any farther incidents of his journey, which passed quietly by, with only such little accidents and inconveniences as befell all travellers in those days.

The count alighted at one of those large furnished hotels which were then common in Paris, but which have very generally given way to more convenient places of

abode for the lonely traveller. It was about three o'clock in the day when he arrived; but the aspect of the great city, after having for so many years enjoyed the calm and quiet scenes of the country, lay heavy and gloomy upon his heart. There were none of the sights or sounds which refresh the eye or the ear; there was nothing to divert any sense from the consciousness of being in the midst of a wide and heartless multitude, without one feeling in common with any of the human beings who surrounded him. The count was somewhat fatigued also, and he therefore determined to pass the rest of that day in repose, and to wait until the next ere he visited the Duke de Choiseul, who had signed the letter commanding him to appear in Paris.

It proved unfortunate that he did so; for, on sending the next day to inquire at what hour the duke would receive him, he found that the minister had quitted Paris the preceding night for his country seat, called Chanteloup, in the beautiful valley of Arpajon, and was not expected to return for several days. Knowing that in the court of Louis XV., as in all other despotic courts, prompt obedience at the first summons is always looked upon with much favour, the count now hesitated as to what course he should pursue in order to show that he had lost not a moment's time in executing the king's commands.

Neither Versailles nor Arpajon was very far from Paris; but the count, from his old knowledge of monarchs and statesmen, judged that it would be best to show his obedience to the minister even before the king, and he consequently ordered horses to be put to his carriage, and took the road to Chanteloup.

Perfectly at his ease in regard to any offence against the government, Monsieur de Castelneau gazed forth upon the country, and endeavoured to amuse his mind with the scenery between Paris and Arpajon. As every one must know who has travelled on the road to Étampes, there is nothing very striking to be seen by the way, except occasionally some beautiful chateaux and parks, and the hill of Montlhéry, with its curious old tower. But just at the moment that the count was gazing forth from the window of the carriage, and raising his eyes towards that tower with the smile of one who recognises an old friend, a carriage, with a musketeer on either side, passed him at a rapid rate on the way towards

**Paris.** In the inside of the carriage was a gentleman, whom Monsieur de Castelneau instantly recognised as the Baron de Cajare; but the two vehicles had rolled past each other before he could at all see who was the person that occupied another seat in the carriage with the baron.

A few minutes more brought the count to the chateau of Chanteloup; and, passing through the park, he was soon in the great court, whence he sent a servant to demand audience of the minister. Everything now passed with the utmost rapidity: the innumerable domestics who were seen hurrying about the chateau seemed endowed with superhuman agility; so quick were all their motions, so rapidly they came and disappeared. It was simply, however, that the character of their master, in this as in almost all cases, affected his dependants; and scarcely could the count alight from his carriage and enter the hall, ere the messenger who had gone to the duke returned, desiring him to follow. Passing through one or two rooms filled with beautiful pictures—some of the Italian and French school, but more of the Flemish—the count was led to a large library, of which the servant threw open the door, announcing him in a loud tone.

On the other side of the room, seated at a table, and writing with the utmost rapidity, was a gentleman of very diminutive stature, extremely ugly in face, and with that dark saturnine complexion which is more commonly met with in the French capital than anywhere else. Yet there was something in that countenance so full of fire and animation, thought and intelligence, that the expression was worth all the beauty which ever was given to man. As soon as the count entered, the duke laid down his pen, rose from his seat, crossed the room with infinite grace and dignity, and, taking his visiter by the hand, pointed to a chair near a window which looked out upon the park, saying, “In one moment I shall be at your service; my letter is nearly finished. Your goodness will excuse me, I am sure. From that window you will find a fine view. Fancy it but a picture by Poussin, and you will have occupation for five minutes at least.”

“It is from the hand of a greater master, my lord,” replied the count, “whose pictures, to say the truth, I am fonder of contemplating than even those of Poussin himself.”

"True, sir, true," replied the duke, in his quick *way*; "I perfectly agree with you: but we value the handi-work of Poussin, perhaps because we pay for it, more than the works of nature, because they are freely given by the bounty of God. We are a sad, obtuse race, Monsieur le Comte, and we need to be flogged into liking what is good: we value nothing that we are not charged anything for; but, as I said, I will be at your service in a minute."

He then seated himself once more at the table, while the count took the chair near the window, and gazed forth upon the valley of Arpajon. Its green freshness was cheering to his eye, and he certainly could not have found a more pleasant subject of contemplation than the soft, calm valley, with the sweet little stream flowing in the midst.

While he sat there it three or four times occurred that a secretary entered from a room at the side, and presented a paper to the duke in silence. Choiseul took it, glanced his eye rapidly over it, signed his name at the bottom, and gave it back again without a word. All was rapid and energetic in his house as in his ministry, and not a moment was lost while business was going forward. At the end of about five minutes, or rather more, the letter was concluded, folded up, sealed, and the small silver bell which stood at his right hand rung. Its tongue was scarcely still and its place upon the table resumed, when a servant appeared and approached with a bow. The duke gave the man the letter, saying, "A horse and courier to Versailles. Back by four o'clock!"

The servant again bowed and retired; and the duke, laying down the pen which he had continued to hold, rose from his seat, and, seeming to cast off the load of care, advanced towards the window where the count was seated, saying with a smile, "And now, Monsieur le Comte de Castelneau, to resume what we were talking about. That is a most beautiful scene, is it not?"

"I have seen more beautiful," replied the count, "and have just come from among them."

"That is the reason," replied the Duke de Choiseul, "why you and I estimate this view differently. You come from the bright scenes of Quercy, green fields, old castles, fine ruins, broad rivers, manifold streams and fountains. I recollect it all very well. I come from

amid gray houses, dusty streets, dull bureaus in Paris; and from gold fringes, satin curtains, and buhl tables at Versailles. Therefore this view strikes me as the sweetest thing the eye can look upon. But there is more in it still. You and I, had we the magic power of one of the necromancers whom good Monsieur Galland has told us of, and could bring hither whatever prospect we chose, would each pitch upon a very different view from the other, and yet we should both be right. This may seem very strange, but it is true."

"I can easily conceive it is, my lord," replied the count.

"In what way, in what way, may I ask?" said the Duke de Choiseul, with his peculiar grace of manner. "I would fain know if our reasonings on the subject are the same."

"I suppose, my lord," replied the count, in his usual calm and thoughtful tone, "I suppose that you, continually busied in matters of the deepest importance, harassed with the cares and the wants of a whole nation, and contemplating daily matters in themselves vast, striking, and terrible, must naturally prefer, in a place where you seek temporary repose, all that is calm, quiet, and refreshing, softness without asperities, and variety without abruptness."

"Exactly, exactly!" replied the duke, his whole face lighting up with a smile; "and you, on your part, living in calm and quiet retirement, would prefer what is more bold and striking to the eye; something, in short, that excites the imagination through the sight, and stirs up within us a gentle sort of agitation, sufficient to give life and variety to thoughts that might otherwise wear and overload the mind."

"You have expressed my feelings on this subject, my lord," replied the count, "as if you could see into my breast."

"I do!" answered the Duke de Choiseul; "and therefore I say, Monsieur de Castelnau, that you may go back to Paris with the most perfect ease and tranquillity of mind. I want no farther conversation with you to show me that you have not been mingling in the dangerous and exciting course of faction and sedition, otherwise you would love the calm scene as well as I do. You may return, then, at ease—"

"To Castelnau?" said the count.

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"No, I must not exactly say that," replied the Duke de Choiseul, "till I have heard the king's pleasure on the subject. But you may go back to Paris without any disquietude, unless, indeed, you will do the duchess and myself the honour of dining here to-day, when I can show you some other pictures, as you say, not by so great a master as that, but perhaps by the finest painters who have ever imitated the works of the Great Artificer of all."

"Nay, my lord," replied the count, with a smile, "I am but a rude countryman, and for many years have mingled little with society."

"I will not take a refusal," replied the duke. "I do not know that any one is expected, and therefore I will conduct you to the duchess, who will entertain you for half an hour, while I conclude the business of the day: forgive me for preceding you, that I may show the way."

"There is one question, my lord," said Monsieur de Castelneau, as they went on, "which I would fain ask, if you will permit me."

"What is that, count? what is that?" said the duke. "I will answer freely if I can."

"It is simply, my lord," replied the count, "to whom I am indebted for the pleasant suspicions which it seems have been entertained of my conduct?"

"Nay, nay, nay! Monsieur de Castelneau," exclaimed the duke, with a laugh, "we must be upon honour with our good *mouchards*. Why, if we gave them up on every piece of information that we receive, there would be nothing but cudgelling one honest man or another of them in Paris all day long."

"He was not a very honest man, my lord," replied the count, "who made this charge against me; and I strongly suspect that he was no *mouchard* either."

"Then you have your eye upon some one," said the duke, immediately. "Whom do you suspect?"

"The Baron de Cajare," replied the count, at once.

The Duke de Choiseul laughed. "How secrets betray themselves, Monsieur de Castelneau!" he said: "it is clear, then, you have some quarrel with the Baron de Cajare."

"Not in the least, my lord duke," replied the count. "When last we met we were upon friendly terms; but, though I have not betrayed the secret, I will tell it with-

out hesitation. The Baron de Cajare somewhat covets the hand and fortune of a young lady under my care : he has not prospered much in his suit with her, and would fain have her and myself in Paris, that he may pursue it farther."

" Ha ! is that it !" said the Duke de Choiseul, with a thoughtful smile. " The Baron de Cajare is in the Bastile—at least I trust that he is there by this time, for he left me an hour ago to return thither. But come, let us join the duchess, count. She shall show you her collection of miniatures."

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## CHAPTER XX.

THE Duchess of Choiseul was a woman of very superior mind. She received the Count de Castelneau with kindness and affability, but with a degree of reserve; for it seems that she had known something of him in former years, when he was the Abbé de Castelneau, and she Countess de Stainville, her husband not having at that time reached the eminent station which he now filled. Her first recollections, therefore, of Monsieur de Castelneau were not favourable; but a very few minutes' conversation with him removed the bad impression; and when she heard of years passed in solitude in the country; when she heard him talk of his abhorrence of Paris, of his desire to return to the calm shades of Castelneau, and marked the distaste he felt towards the gay and glittering society of the capital, she saw evidently that he was a man upon whom time and thought had produced a beneficial effect, and whose heart had been ultimately amended, rather than depraved, by its commerce with the world. The hour which he spent with her alone was thus rendered not an unpleasant one. They spoke not of the past, but in all probability they both thought of it; and that thought, as the far retrospect of memory always does, mingled some melancholy, but of a sweet and gentle kind, with their other feelings; so that, when the duke returned, it needed several minutes of the society of the most cheerful man in France to enliven the conversation and turn it into a gayer course.

The duke, who could, when he so pleased, lay aside entirely the minister and statesman, and appear simply as the highly-accomplished French gentleman, now threw off the reserve of his station with the Count de Castelneau, and led him through the apartments of his chateau, showing him all those fine pictures, gems, coins, and other objects of art for which Chanteloup was at one time famous. He found his companion nothing inferior to himself in taste or acquaintance with the arts, and much his superior in learning; and many an elaborate discussion took place upon the merits of this or that object, the minister conducting it with all his wit, fluency, and grace, Monsieur de Castelneau replying more shortly, but from a fund of knowledge and judgment which left little more to be said. There was a sufficient difference of opinion between the duke and his guest to make their communication varied and entertaining, yet a sufficient similarity to render it conversation rather than argument.

More than an hour was thus passed in that sort of conversation which was the greatest possible relief to the mind of Choiseul; and, on their return to the apartments of the duchess, they found her with a young gentleman in a military costume seated on a footstool at her feet, with his elbow leaning on the ground, and his eyes raised to the countenance of the lady. The moment the duke and his companion entered, the other gentleman rose, and the minister greeted him with a smile.

"Ah, Ernest!" said the duke. "What brings you here, you wild youth! I hope this is not a new absence without leave."

"Oh no, my dear lord," replied the other. "I have full leave at this moment; for, since I left my father on Saturday week, I have been at our headquarters, received my reprimand, and obtained permission to come hither to excuse myself to the king."

"Was your reprimand severe?" asked the duke, with a peculiar smile, well knowing that he had taken means to render it the contrary.

The young gentleman laughed. "Severe and cutting as the breath of the southerly wind," he said. "Oh no, my lord, I owe you all thanks; but I am sure your own heart justifies you in having interceded for me."

"I should not have done it otherwise, Ernest, had you

been my own son," replied Choiseul; "but, though you had committed a fault which could not be passed over without some notice, yet the call to your father's sick-bed—to his deathbed, as you had reason to think it—was an excuse valid in mitigation, especially when you were not actually in campaign, and when your presence was evidently not required with your regiment. It was not absolutely necessary that you should present yourself before the king; but perhaps it is better, in order that this affair may not stop your promotion. Your father is nearly well, I find. I had a letter from him this morning."

The young gentleman replied that he had also heard from his father; and the duke, then turning to Monsieur de Castelneau, said, "You must allow me, count, to introduce to you a young gentleman from your own part of the country—a nephew of Madame de Choiseul—Monsieur de Nogent. Ernest, this is your neighbour, the Count de Castelneau."

The young gentleman started with surprise; but the count took his hand, expressing much pleasure in seeing him, and adding a commendation of the good old Baron de Nogent, short, indeed, and simple, but in such terms as brought a glistening light into the son's eyes.

"Your good opinion of him, Monsieur de Castelneau," replied Ernest de Nogent, "must be most gratifying to him, as I know he esteems you highly. May I ask," he continued, "how was your fair ward when you left Castelneau, which must have been some days, I presume, after I quitted that part of the country myself?"

"I travelled but slowly," replied the count, "as I have been suffering much in health. Annette, I am happy to say, though not well enough to accompany me, was in no danger."

"Ill, ill!" exclaimed Ernest de Nogent, with a look that astonished not only the count, but Monsieur and Madame de Choiseul also not a little, so eager, so anxious, so apprehensive was it. "The last time I saw her she seemed in perfect health."

"I did not know that you were acquainted with her," said the count, with an air of more surprise than pleasure.

"Oh, yes!" answered Monsieur de Nogent; "though my acquaintance with Mademoiselle de St. Marin is of a very recent date, it is quite sufficient to interest me

deeply in her welfare. It began by my rendering her a slight service when she was attacked by a wolf."

"Oh, now I comprehend, now I comprehend!" exclaimed the count, taking his hand and shaking it warmly. "I owe you many thanks, Monsieur de Nogent, for saving the life of one most dear to me. I must write to Annette, and let her know who was her deliverer, for, at the time, she was ignorant of your name."

"I dared not give it," replied Ernest de Nogent, "for I was at that time absent from my regiment without leave, living in close concealment in my father's house, and only venturing out through the woods to meet the person who conveyed my letters to and from Paris; for I had taken care to interest Monsieur de Choiseul in my cause, by representing to him that nothing but the state of my father's health had induced me to commit what was, in truth, a breach of duty."

"You said your acquaintance with Annette commenced," said the count, returning to the point which most interested his mind. "Have you, then, seen her since?"

"Oh, yes," replied Ernest de Nogent: "I saw her at my father's house on the very day I set off to rejoin the army. She then ascertained who I was, and I suppose some accidental circumstance must have prevented her from telling the facts to you."

The count paused, and meditated for a minute, but the cloud gradually left his brow. "Yes," he said, thoughtfully, "yes, there were circumstances that prevented her from explaining the facts, and I am sorry to say those very circumstances are connected with her illness. You must, then, have left Castel Nogent on the same day that I quitted Castelneau; and on that very day, in returning from her visit to your father, her horse took fright at a flash of lightning while she was suffering him to drink in the stream, and she was consequently thrown and considerably injured by the fall. I did not leave her, however, till the surgeons assured me there was no danger; and I have since heard from her, giving me the assurance that she was even better than when I left her."

"I am happy, most happy to hear it," replied Ernest de Nogent; and he then fell into a fit of thought, from which he did not rouse himself till he found the eyes of

all present fixed somewhat intently upon him. He cast it off as soon as he perceived that such was the case, and made an effort to talk cheerfully on other subjects, in which he succeeded. But what the Count de Castelneau had observed had cast him, in turn, into a reverie; and, notwithstanding all his natural command over himself, he could not resist the strong impression upon him, but remained till dinner was announced somewhat silent and gloomy, occupied by one of those internal struggles which absorb all the energies of the mind, and leave the material organs to act merely as parts of a machine, moved by the great spring of habit.

By the time, however, that the meal was served and he had sat down to table, he had again conquered: he had successfully repelled the assault of the evil spirit upon his heart, and driven him back, though the defences of the place might be injured by the siege that it had undergone. In such a warfare, men would do well to remember that the enemy is one who never altogether raises that siege, but proceeds day after day, while the fortress crumbles down before him, unless some glorious and mighty help is sought and obtained to succour the distressed garrison.

At dinner, then, the Count de Castelneau resumed all his cheerfulness, spoke kindly and warmly to Ernest de Nogent, and could not help acknowledging to himself that in him there were evident many excellent qualities, of which the Baron de Cajare had shown no sign. The Duke of Choiseul, on his part, had already remarked several things in the demeanour, both of the Count de Castelneau and of Ernest de Nogent, which excited his curiosity; and he determined to unravel the mystery, if mystery there were; but the task of prying into the heart of the Count de Castelneau was no slight one; and, notwithstanding all his penetration, Choiseul remained at fault.

The heart of Ernest de Nogent, however, was much more easily to be studied; and, as the duke led the conversation back to the subject of Mademoiselle de St. Morin, and made the young officer give the whole particulars of the adventure with the wolf, the changes of Ernest's countenance might have shown to eyes less penetrating than those which looked upon him that there was a deeper interest in his bosom towards her whom he had saved than could arise from the incident

itself, or from the effect of a mere passing acquaintance.

"Well, now, Ernest," said the duke, after the conversation had gone on for some time, "you shall let us know what *you* think of Mademoiselle de St. Morin. From something which Monsieur de Castelneau said a minute or two ago, I am inclined to believe that she is extremely beautiful. Is it not so, Monsieur de Castelneau?"

"I really do not know," replied the count, "from what part of my discourse your lordship's keen wit has derived intimation of a fact which I am not at all inclined to deny. As far as my poor judgment goes, Annette is indeed most beautiful. But of course I am not so good a judge as young men."

"The deduction was very easy, Monsieur de Castelneau," replied the duke, who rather prided himself upon the rapidity of his calculations. "What you said regarding Monsieur le Baron de Cajare led me at once to conclude that the young lady was very beautiful. You would not have suspected him of taking such rash measures unless you suspected him of being very much in love; and he is not a man to be much in love with anything less than transcendent beauty."

The count smiled, but did not reply; and the duke went on to press his wife's nephew upon the subject, saying, "But come, Ernest, you have not answered my question. What is your opinion of the young lady's beauty?"

"I can but say that she is very beautiful," replied Ernest de Nogent; "indeed, the most beautiful being that I ever beheld; for her beauty is not in her features alone, but in the expression, which is ever changing, but ever perfect."

"Hyperbole, hyperbole! my dear Ernest," cried the Duchess of Choiseul. "How can the expression be always changing, and yet always perfect? If it is perfect at one moment, any change from that must be less perfect."

"Oh, my dear aunt," replied the young officer, "the Abbé Barthelemy has spoiled you by teaching you metaphysics. Give me that ring off your finger."

"A modest request, indeed," said the duchess, but taking off the ring at the same time, and holding it out to her nephew.

"Look at this diamond," said Ernest de Nogent, with a smile: "what colour does it reflect when I turn it thus?"

"Green," replied the duchess.

"And when I turn it thus?" demanded her nephew.

"Bright yellow," she replied.

"And thus?" he continued.

"Pure rose colour," was the answer.

"And each as bright as the other, my dear aunt, are they not?" continued Ernest de Nogent, giving her back the ring; "and such is the expression of Mademoiselle de St. Morin's countenance, ever varying, but always perfectly bright and beautiful."

"You deserve the ring for your illustration," replied the duchess, rolling it across the table to him. "If the young lady's heart be as much a diamond as you represent her person to be, she must, indeed, be worthy of the noblest race in France."

Monsieur de Castelneau would fain have mused; but he struggled with himself, and overcame the temptation. Nay, more, he took part again in the conversation regarding Annette, assuring the Duchesse de Choiseul that her person afforded but a faint image of her heart and mind; and, turning to the duke, he added, "Just as it seems to me, my lord, that a picture, however masterly, is but an imperfect image of what we see in nature."

The duke smiled to this return of what they had been speaking of before, and replied, "You are such an admirer of the beauties of nature, Monsieur de Castelneau, that, ere you return to Paris, I must take you through our park here in the direction of Versailles, where we have even more beauty than towards Arpajon."

The conversation now deviated into other channels, and fell upon subjects of general interest till dinner was concluded. After a short pause in the saloon of the duchess, the duke proposed to Monsieur de Castelneau that they should walk forth into the park. Madame de Choiseul, however, remained at home; and Ernest de Nogent, though he would willingly have accompanied the Count de Castelneau, whose good opinion he was desirous of cultivating, determined to stay with his aunt, not knowing what sort of communication the minister might be desirous of holding with his guest. The subjects started, however, were altogether general, and referred principally to matters of art and taste. Before

they returned, indeed, the curious circumstance of Monsieur de Castelneau meeting his young neighbour Ernest de Nogent there, led the Duc de Choiseul on to speak of the young officer's character and family. Of Ernest himself he gave an account which, from the lips of the duke, was commendation indeed.

"We love him scarcely less than if he were our own son," he said; "but I have made it a point not to press any members of my own family into public employments. Fortune he has little or none, poor fellow, and must make his way with his sword; for, alas! so little flows into my coffers for my services to the state, and so much flows out of them to supply some of the necessities of the state,\* that, though we may regret that we have no children of our own, it is probably far better that such is the case."

"I did not know, my lord," replied the count, "that the Duchesse de Choiseul had a sister, and still less did I know that her sister had married Monsieur de Nogent. I always understood that that gentleman had married a Mademoiselle de Lisle, while the duchess I remember well as the heiress of the noble house of Du Chatel."

"True, true," replied the duke; "Madame de Nogent was her half sister; the same mother, but another father. Poor Marie de Lisle had little or no fortune of her own, and she married a man who had little fortune either. We minded not that, however, for his blood is as noble as any in France; and though a mésalliance is what, of course, we could not have tolerated for a moment, we cared not for the accidental circumstances of fortune: indeed, my sweet lady herself gave part of her own to increase that of her sister."

"Then, notwithstanding all the fine new notions of the present day," said the count, "you still hold, my lord duke, that there is something in noble blood which should prevent it from allying itself with that of an inferior class."

"I trust, sir," replied the Duke of Choiseul, raising his head, "that there is no gentleman of really pure blood in France that can think otherwise. These new notions that you speak of are but set abroad by men

\* This is known to have been absolutely the fact. The Duc de Choiseul having more than once supplied, from his own fortune, deficiencies in the revenue, which other ministers might have taken less generous means to fill up.

who would fain rise into our stations by any means ; and we should hold this barrier but the more firmly against them."

The count mused. The very same prejudices of birth which had been expressed by the Duc de Choiseul, he had himself combated a thousand times ; but there was something in his heart which would not, on the present occasion, let him say one word in opposition to the duke's arguments. The minister remarked his silence, and asked, " Do you not think so, Monsieur de Castelnau ?"

" Perhaps I am not so strongly wedded to such opinions as you are," replied the count, with an evasion which he did not forgive himself for, even while he used it ; " but so far I do think with you fully, that, though no means should be employed to prevent courage, genius, and exertion from raising a man to the very highest point in society, yet we should use all means to prevent anything but virtue and talents from producing that result."

The Duc de Choiseul was not quite satisfied with this reply ; but, as it was a matter of no consequence, and they were now taking their way homeward, he turned the conversation to the object which had brought the Count de Castelnau thither, and said, " Perhaps it may be better for you to see the king at once, when I have made my report to his majesty in regard to our interview of this morning. I shall go over to-morrow to Versailles about eleven. By the hour of noon my private audience will be at an end, and I will then introduce you to his majesty's presence, as well as Ernest, who has to make his peace, you hear. May I ask you to be kind enough to bring him down with you in your carriage to Versailles ? for he must go back to Paris to-night, as it will be as well that he should not stop here till he is reinstated in the royal favour."

" I shall be most happy, my lord," replied the count. " Will not Monsieur de Nogent return in my carriage to Paris ?"

" He came on horseback," replied the duke. " But doubtless he will prefer your society to a solitary ride."

The proposal was accordingly made : Ernest de Nogent accepted the offer gladly ; and as the carriage proceeded towards Paris, much conversation took place between him and his companion. It was of a pleasant

and tranquil kind. Without knowing why, Ernest kept off the subject of Annette ; and the Count de Castelnau felt, when he parted from him, that, under most circumstances, he could have made that man his friend.

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## CHAPTER XXI.

THAT splendid monstrosity, the palace of Versailles, was certainly not in the same state of magnificence in which it had been placed by the vain ostentation of Louis XIV., but still it displayed a degree of luxury and extravagance which formed a painful contrast with the situation of a suffering and indigent population. There was also, in the aspect of the people who thronged its saloons and galleries, an air of dissolute frivolity, of careless, mocking superciliousness, which generally marks a court or country on the eve of its downfall. When the great of a nation have learned to feel a contempt for all those things that are in themselves good and great, the nation is soon taught to feel a contempt for the great ; and, as a part of the nation, the Count de Castelnau felt no slight portion of scorn for all that surrounded him, as, accompanied by Ernest de Nogent, he walked through the crowded halls of the palace towards the audience which had been promised him by the Duc de Choiseul. He, perhaps, more than any one else, felt and contemned the persons and the scene around him. His eye was fresh from purer things—his mind had been sanctified by a commerce with virtue, truth, and nature—and all the vice, and the idle levity, and the ostentatious nothingness which appeared before his sight, struck him as something new and horrible, though he had witnessed the same scene many a time before.

The conversation of Ernest de Nogent had not tended to smooth the way for the impression made by Versailles. There was a freshness about the young nobleman's mind—a truth, an eagerness, a candour—which harmonized well with the bright simplicity of God's own creations, but were a living repreach to the corrupted manners of that court. Without the slightest idea that the count could entertain towards him any but the

most kindly feelings, knowing of no objections which could be raised against his pretensions to Annette, except the comparative poverty of his house, he had striven frankly and freely to please her guardian during their short intercourse, and, in spite of very repugnant feelings in the breast of the count, had succeeded.

He was well known to many members of the court, but none knew or recognised the Count de Castelneau; and, as they moved on through those spacious halls, many a gay and glittering officer stopped Ernest de Nogent, spoke a word or two with him on his own account, and then, in a whisper, inquired who was his graver friend. There was something in the air of the count, however, in his calm, firm step, his thoughtful but self-possessed demeanour, the slight and somewhat scornful smile that curled his lip, and his stern, irrepressible eye, which produced a feeling of reverence in men who had reverence for very few things on earth, and made them give way before him when they might have jostled a man of superior station.

At length, as the count and his companion approached the door which communicated with the king's apartments, without perceiving any sign of its having been opened that day, Ernest de Nogent asked one of the *garde du corps* if any one had been yet admitted.

"Oh, no!" replied the officer; "the king has not come from the *Parc au Cerfs*. He has got a fresh importation from Provence, and we may be kept these two hours."

Ernest de Nogent gave a look of disgust, and turned towards the Count de Castelneau, as if to interpret what had been said; but the count bowed his head, and replied to the look, "I heard, my young friend, and understand; such turpitudes, unhappily, fly far."

The anticipation of the officer of the *garde du corps* did not prove exactly correct. For about half an hour longer the count and Ernest de Nogent were detained, hearing around them more licentious ribaldry, perhaps, than ever was spoken in any other court in Europe. Witty and brilliant it certainly was, as well as scandalous, malicious, and gross; but that wit must always be of a somewhat feeble and debilitated kind which is obliged to have recourse to calumny and licentiousness to support it under either arm.

At length the door opened, and the *Duc de Choiseul*

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himself came forth, brilliantly habited in the costume of the times, and bearing a portfolio under his arm. He spoke a few words with his usual quickness and precision to several persons who stood round the door, and who each pressed for a word with the minister. But he pushed his way forward all the time till his eyes fell upon the Count de Castelneau and Ernest de Nogent. The moment he saw them, he thrust another gentleman out of the way with very little ceremony, and said in a quick tone, as he beckoned them up, "Come with me, come with me, the king is waiting for you. Both," he added, seeing Ernest linger behind, "both of you."

They followed in silence; and when they had passed through the door into an anteroom, the duke whispered, "I need not tell you to be cautious. The king is in no very placable mood to-day. Ernest, no rashness: remember how you once offended, when you were page of honour, by a thoughtless reply."

"I will be careful," replied the young officer; "for I must not do discredit to anything you may have said in my favour."

Passing through another room, the duke led his companions to the door of the king's cabinet, where a page stood to guard against intrusion. The duke entered first; and then returning, brought the two gentlemen into the royal presence, saying, "Monsieur de Castelneau, sire! and my nephew, Ernest de Nogent, whom you were good enough to say you would see together."

The only object worthy of remark in the cabinet when the count entered was a gentleman dressed in black, who was seated at the opposite side of the chamber, with a table on his right hand covered with writing materials, and his foot raised upon a stool. He was by no means a prepossessing person in appearance. Though his features in themselves were fine, there was a lack of feeling in his countenance, a want of soul in the whole expression, that was very repulsive. There was nothing either inquiring, or gracious, or menacing in the face: all was cold; and yet it was cold without dulness. You could not suppose, in looking on those features, that mind was wanting: it was merely an appearance of *want of interest* in the objects before him, tinged with contempt; but that slight scornful turn of the lip was all that checkered the look of utter apathy with which he regarded the count and his companion...

The complexion of the king (for he it was) seemed to have once been delicate and womanish; but the skin was now wrinkled with years, the cheeks had fallen in, and a little rouge had evidently been added where the colour had abandoned the cheek, rendering the monarch anything but more pleasing in appearance. His lips were thin and pale; and it was impossible to gaze on him without feeling an impression that debauchery more than age had shared in the decay which no art could hide.

The Count de Castelneau, both on account of his age and rank, advanced first on entering the room; but the king called the young officer forward, saying, "Here, Ernest, come hither! So you thought fit to quit your regiment without leave, young man."

"Sire," replied Ernest de Nogent, advancing, "I applied for leave; and only ventured upon the rash act which I did commit on account of my father's severe illness."

"You were very wrong, sir," replied the king. "There is no excuse for want of discipline."

"Most true, sire," answered the young nobleman; "I am without excuse, and came not to urge any; but merely to cast myself upon your majesty's clemency, trusting you will consider that sometimes our feelings overpower our reason, and that I hastened to my father's side when I heard he was at the point of death as wildly and inconsiderately as I might fly to the side of my king did I hear he was in peril or in difficulty."

The monarch turned to the duke; and the count observed that, whenever he spoke to his minister, the king's countenance relaxed into a faint smile. "You say, duke, that he has received his reprimand!" he asked; and, on the duke bowing his head in token of assent, he went on: "Well, sir, I have left the matter in the hands of the general, and therefore I shall add nothing to what he has thought fit to do, except a warning to be more careful in future. Now, Monsieur de Castelneau, what have you to say?"

"Very little, sire," replied the count, "except to wish your majesty good health and high prosperity."

The king turned to the Duc de Choiseul, and the Duc de Choiseul looked down without replying. "Did you not tell me, my lord," said the king, "that the Count de Castelneau wished to speak with me?"

"Not precisely, sire," answered the duke. "You may recollect that some suspicions were excited."

"Oh yes, by the Baron de Cajare," replied the king; "I remember very well."

"Will your majesty permit me to remind you," said the duke, "that it was by no direct accusation on the part of the baron, but by what he let fall regarding the retired way in which Monsieur de Castelneau lived, when he was speaking of the discontent that has manifested itself in Quercy and the Agenois."

"It continually happens, your majesty," said the Count de Castelneau, with a faint smile, "that when any one wishes to do us an injury, who is too cowardly to make a bold accusation, and too feeble to affect us by open efforts, he endeavours to degrade us in the opinion of those to whom we are most attached by insinuating what he dares not assert; and where he is very mean and very contemptible indeed, he couches his insinuation in such terms as to leave the minds of the persons who hear to draw the deduction that he is afraid to point out himself. Such has been the case, it would seem, with the Baron de Cajare. He said nothing against me, but told your majesty that I was living a solitary and unsocial life, far from your royal court and person, in the same breath that he spoke of seditions in the neighbouring districts, and other things that might well excite your indignation, leaving you to draw the inference that I had some share in these troubles. He forgot, however, to remind your majesty that I had been bred up for a profession which counsels retirement and seclusion, and that—though I never actually entered the church, and certainly did cast off my gown when I unexpectedly came into great wealth and high rank—I remained attached to the clerical profession as Abbé de Castelneau till I had passed the fortieth year of my age. He did not tell you, sire, as he might have told you, that these troubles were in a remote part of the province; that I neither had nor could have anything to do with them; that I have never in my life taken any part in either a religious or a political dispute; that I have no communication with refractory parliaments, no dealings with Jesuits, no connexion with Jansenists. All this the Baron de Cajare might have told your majesty at the same time; and, had he done so, he would have prevented your suspecting for a moment one of your most faithful subjects."

" You are eloquent, Monsieur de Castelneau," said the king, with the curl of his lip growing somewhat stronger; " pray, has the Baron de Cajare any cause of enmity towards you ? "

The Duc de Choiseul hastened to interfere; for he knew that the king's mood at that moment was a very irritable and unsettled one.

" Monsieur de Castelnau has explained the whole to me, sire," he said; " there is no cause of enmity, indeed; but it would appear that Monsieur de Cajare would fain have the count take up his abode in Paris rather than remain at Castelneau."

" Indeed !" exclaimed the king, with more animation than usual; " how so ? upon what account ? "

" Why, it would seem, sire," replied the duke, thinking, perhaps, a little of Ernest de Nogent while he spoke, and forgetting the peculiar character and frightful license of the person he addressed, " it would seem, sire, that Monsieur de Castelneau has a ward, a young lady of very extraordinary beauty—at least, if I may judge by Ernest's account. With her the Baron de Cajare has fallen in love; and as he is as much in love with Paris as the lady—and, indeed, cannot absent himself long from the capital—he wished to make your majesty and me the tools of bringing the count and his fair ward to Paris."

A peculiar, unpleasant, simpering smile came upon the old king's face as he asked, " Is she in Paris, then, Monsieur de Castelneau ? "

" No, sire," replied the count, " she is not; I left her behind."

The Duc de Choiseul perceived at once from that smile the evil he had done without thinking of it, and he hastened to the aid of Monsieur de Castelneau, saying, " Of course, sire, the count, at once suspecting the Baron de Cajare, and understanding his motives, did not choose to gratify him."

" We must make him gratify the king," said Louis XV., with the same meaning and detestable look.

The Count de Castelneau answered boldly, " In all honourable things, sire, none shall be found more ready to gratify you. Dishonourable things," he added, neither regarding a frown on the face of Louis nor a sign from the Duc de Choiseul, " my king knows himself and me, I am sure, too well to ask."

Louis's brow was as black as night, and his meager hand grasped the side of his chair, while his foot beat the ground with a sharp, quick movement. It was wonderful, however, how far he could conquer himself when his passions or his vices required an effort; and, after remaining in silence for a moment or two, he turned to Ernest de Nogent, asking, "Is she so very beautiful, then, Ernest?"

The young nobleman would willingly have belied poor Annette's beauty, but he dared not tell a falsehood, and he replied, "She is indeed, sire, very beautiful."

A dead pause ensued; no one, of course, wishing to renew the conversation but the king, and he not knowing very well how to carry it on farther for his own particular views and purposes. At length he said, turning to the duke, "The baron is in the Bastile, I think, Monsieur de Choiseul?"

"He is, sire," replied the duke, hoping to engage another of the king's passions, and make the one counteract the other. "His insolent disregard of your majesty's express commands, when you directed him to avoid all personal interference with my nephew Ernest; his going down into Quercy the very day that he received notification of your wish to the contrary, taking with him, on his own authority, a guard, evidently for the purpose of disobeying your most strict orders; all these circumstances, sire, together with several others which I shall have to lay before your majesty ere long, when I have fully investigated them, made me instantly send down the deputy of the lieutenant-general to arrest this contumacious person, and lodge him in the Bastile. I examined him myself for an hour yesterday morning, and met with nothing but cool insolence both towards your majesty and myself."

The duke had spoken at some length in order to draw off the king's attention; but Louis was not to be led away from the subject predominant at that moment in his mind, and he asked quietly, "Pray, Monsieur de Choiseul, how long do you think it may be before the case is complete against the Baron de Cajare?"

The duke did not understand the king's object, and replied, "Perhaps not for six weeks or two months, sire; for there is a gambling piece of business, where all did not go quite fairly, it would seem, which must be inquired into. One of the party threw himself out of the

window and was killed ; but several of the officers who were present are now absent in Flanders and on the Rhine."

"Say three months, say three months, Monsieur de Choiseul," exclaimed Louis ; "we must have his conduct thoroughly sifted. Better say three months."

"It may very likely be as long as that, sire," replied the duke, who was completely deceived, and thought that he had carried off the king's attention from *Annette de St. Morin*. "Probably, to arrive at a satisfactory conclusion, we shall be that time or more."

"Very well, then," said the king, turning to the count, "we shall command you, as you are particularly interested in this business, to remain in Paris for the space of those three months, presenting yourself weekly at our court, in order that we may communicate with you upon the subject when we think fit. You will also, if you take our advice, send for your household, and bring this young lady from time to time to Versailles. We give her the invitation."

He spoke with an air of dignity and a contracted brow ; and when he had done he bowed his head slightly, to intimate that the audience was at an end.

The count and Ernest de Nogent retired without reply ; but the moment they had passed through the ante-chambers and entered the general reception rooms, the young officer turned eagerly to the count, demanding, in a low voice, but with an air of terrible anxiety and apprehension, "What do you intend to do ?"

"To obey the king's commands," replied the count, calmly, "*but not to take his advice.*"

"Thank God !" exclaimed Ernest de Nogent, eagerly. "Oh ! Monsieur de Castelneau, be firm ; I beseech you, be firm."

"I will, my young friend," replied the count, grasping his hand ; "I will ; though, from what I have heard you say, I should think that you would rather desire *Mademoiselle de St. Morin*'s presence in Paris, if I understand right that your regiment is quartered in the neighbourhood."

"It is even now marching for Chateau Thierry," replied the young officer ; "but believe me, Monsieur de Castelneau, I would rather never behold *Mademoiselle de St. Morin* again, than behold her in the contamination of this place. You know not, you cannot know,

all the dark and disgraceful secrets of this very building. It was bad enough when I was here as page of honour nearly nine years ago, but I understand it is infinitely worse now."

Scarcely were the words out of his mouth when his name was called forth from the door of the king's apartments by one of the attendants, and he was forced to go back to the presence of a monarch who was now labouring to blot out, by a course of tyranny and debauchery, the memory of all those fair promises which the early part of his reign had afforded.

The count promised to wait for his young companion, and remained standing alone, busying himself with his own thoughts, and heeding but little the various faces that flitted by him. In about ten minutes Ernest de Nogent rejoined him, with a cheek burning, and an eye fixed anxiously on the ground. "I have kept you," he said, "I have kept you, I am afraid; and I owe any one an apology for making them breathe this air longer than their own business requires. Let us go, Monsieur de Castelneau, let us go."

Walking rapidly through the rooms, the two gentlemen quitted the palace, and, after some little difficulty, found the count's carriage, which was soon rolling with them on the road towards Paris.

"You seem agitated, my young friend," said the count, as Ernest sat beside him in silence, pressing his clasped hands hard together.

"I am indignant as well as agitated, Monsieur de Castelneau," replied Ernest. "I will not offend your ear with that man's inquiries or discourse. I have marred my own fortunes forever, I doubt not; but I care little for that, provided you remain firm, as you have quite the power to do."

"I give you my word of honour, my young friend," replied the count, "that, were I to be kept here forever, and my lodging were to be the Bastile to-morrow on account of my determination, nothing should or shall induce me to send for Annette while the court is in its present degraded state. Sooner than she should come hither I would send her into a foreign country; for there is no state of banishment equal in anguish to that of virtue among evil-doers. Let that satisfy you for the present, and remember that better days may yet come."

## CHAPTER XXII.

THE time had hung somewhat heavily upon the hands of Annette de St. Morin. She felt for some time the injury that she had received from her fall ; she felt her loneliness, too, and the want of her daily conversation with her kind guardian. Her mind seemed to lack food, and her heart also ; for there used to be something pleasant and sweet in the knowledge that there was always some one who loved her near at hand, even when she was roaming about the country alone and the count was at Castelneau. Now there was no one near ; and though the library of the chateau was well stocked with books, she did not visit it often. She knew that there were many books there which her guardian did not wish her to peruse ; and perfectly confident in his kindness and his judgment, she not only did not feel the least desire to read those books, but was fearful lest she should open one of them by accident in seeking for something else. She therefore confined herself entirely to works which she had read before ; and though a twice-read book may be less tedious than a twice-told tale, yet rare is the writing which will afford the same interest and pleasure the second time as the first.

Days slipped by, however, and weeks. She received letter after letter from her guardian, and each was so far satisfactory that it told her he was well, that any charge against him had been rebutted easily, and that he hoped speedily to return, though every one added that business might still detain him for a week or two longer in Paris. All this was true ; but he told her not those facts which he might have found a difficulty in explaining to her pure and high mind. He told her not that the king had twice asked him whether she had yet come to Paris, and that he had been obliged to answer vaguely, that circumstances had prevented her from setting out. The last time he had made this reply, too, it had been received with a frown ; and the count had then very plainly perceived that the time was approaching when he should be obliged to give a more definite explanation of his purposes regarding Annette. His letters, though

calm and moderate in their expression, as was his conversation upon all ordinary occasions, breathed nothing but pleasure in the expectation of seeing her again at Castelneau. But still the days passed, and he appeared not; and the brown autumn coming on showed Annette the yellow side of the leaf as she wandered round the woods of the chateau in solitude of feeling and of thought. That solitude was, however, somewhat cheered from time to time by the visits which she occasionally paid to the old Baron de Nogent; and, after he had more fully recovered his health, by his visits to her in return.

Though he was still somewhat grave in his demeanour, the baron was with her more cheerful than with most people. There was something in the brightness of her youth and beauty which always produced a reflected sparkling from the minds of those around her; and the old nobleman spoke of many things whereof he would have spoken to no one else: of the hope, and the happiness, and the early days which had passed away; and dwelling thus upon the past, he forgot a little of the weariness of the present. The present, however, was not altogether forgotten; for he told her of his son's health, and that the malice of the Baron de Cajare had been frustrated; and he spoke also with enthusiasm of the Duke and Duchess of Choiseul, and of all the kindness which they had shown to Ernest.

That name sounded upon the ear of Annette with a thrilling interest which no other name could produce; and though she never herself led the way to the subject, yet it was sweet to her to sit and listen as the baron spoke of his son. She did not venture, indeed, to mingle much with the conversation when it took that turn: there was something in her heart which made her afraid of what her tongue might say; and she even pronounced the name, when it was necessary, with a degree of timidity which alarmed her for her own feelings, and made her fear that others might discover them, and suppose them to be deeper and stronger than they really were. It may be a question, however, and a difficult one to answer, whether Annette did herself know what was the depth and strength of those feelings. Another question might be, whether the baron did at all discover what their nature was.

Annette often asked herself whether Ernest had told

his father the words which he had spoken to her on their last interview; for she frequently remarked in the baron's eyes, when he spoke to her, a look of interest and tenderness which she could account for in no other way than by supposing that he knew the feelings of his son, and felt affection for her whom that son loved. Then, again, she would ask herself, did Ernest really love her? and the timidity of her young heart would call up like spectres all the tales that she had heard of men's fickleness and inconstancy, and of the cruel trifling with which they will sometimes crush a woman's heart as a child does a butterfly. But, in her own innocence and truth, though she had heard of such things, though she believed that perhaps they might occasionally occur, she could not and would not apply the lesson individually, she could not and would not believe that Ernest de Nogent would so act.

She rested, then, in hope; and one day, having wandered forth upon her accustomed walk, to muse and ponder on all the many things—some sweet, some touched with sadness, but none exactly bitter—that were busy with her imagination at this time, she went on farther than she had been lately accustomed to, and approached the cross and the fountain, which she had not visited on foot since her adventure with the wolf. Fate seemed to guide her thither strangely as to the scene of important events; for, although what I am about to relate may seem but a trifle, it marked an epoch in the life of Annette de St. Morin.

She had scarcely reached the fountain, and was gazing in the cool and refreshing mirror that it afforded, when she saw the good old Baron de Nogent riding down on horseback towards her. He was unattended; and, as soon as he saw her, he dismounted and approached, throwing the bridle of his horse over his arm.

"I was just coming to visit you, my dear young lady," he said. "I have not seen you for a week, and I know not why or how, an impression came upon my mind last night that you were either ill, or that some accident had happened to you. It is ridiculous to yield to such superstitious feelings, I confess; but I could not resist the inclination I felt to inquire after you this morning myself."

Annette smiled and thanked him, and left her fair hand in his, as he held it and gazed in her face, like a father

looking at his child ; and after she had assured him that she was well and happy, he asked if she had lately heard from Paris.

She replied in the affirmative, saying that her guardian had written, only the day before, a long and interesting letter, telling her that, in all probability, he should soon return to Castelneau.

Even as they were speaking, one of the servants from the chateau was seen coming up with great speed, carrying a small packet in his hand. As soon as he could recover breath, he told her that a courier had just arrived from Paris, after travelling night and day. He had brought her that letter, the man said, from the count, and was ordered to deliver it without a moment's delay, as it was of very great importance.

Annette's first question was, "Is he well?" and even while she spoke she opened the letter with a trembling hand, fearing to find some evil tidings.

"The courier said, mademoiselle," replied the servant, "that the count was quite well, and that nothing had happened amiss."

Annette read the letter eagerly, and then asked, in a thoughtful tone, "Who was it brought this letter?"

"I don't know his name, I am sure," replied the servant : "he was none of our own people, but some one whom my lord has hired in Paris, it seems."

Again Annette mused ; and the good baron, seeing that she was embarrassed, and apparently not well pleased, inquired, "Is there anything that I can do to assist you, my dear child? Can I give you advice or help? for something seems to surprise and embarrass you."

"This letter does very much," cried Annette, still holding it in her hand. "Go back, good Jerome, and tell the courier I am about to return home directly. Pray come with me, Monsieur de Nogent, and I will consult with you as I go."

The baron willingly agreed ; and, giving his horse to the servant to ride back to the castle, he drew Annette's arm through his, and walked slowly on with her. As soon as the man was out of hearing, she gave the letter into the hands of Monsieur de Nogent, saying, "It is very strange that my guardian should have written yesterday so very differently in every respect; that yesterday he should tell me that he would return to Castelneau in a few days, whereas now he bids me come to Paris immediately."

"It certainly is strange," replied the baron; "but there may be many causes for it, my dear young lady, of which we can tell nothing. There is only one thing I would remark, which is, that the style of the letter is not altogether like the style in which Monsieur de Castelneau speaks. You must know better than I do, however: are you sure that it is his own hand?"

"Oh yes, quite sure," replied Annette: "there can be no doubt of that. The word Annette, indeed, is not exactly as he usually writes it, but it is certainly his handwriting, I think. Yet I cannot help looking upon it as strange, and fearing that he must be in prison, or ill, or distressed in mind; for there is a sort of restraint, as you observe, in the style which is not at all usual with him."

"We will speak with this courier," said the Baron de Nogent, "and perhaps may learn more from him; but I do remark strongly the same restraint and forced style that you speak of. The letter is so short, too: it is more like the order of the day from a military commander than from a guardian to his adopted child, whom he loves as well, I am sure, as if she were his own: there is something strange about the business which I do not understand; but our only means of ascertaining the truth is by inquiring all the particulars from this courier."

With such conversation they proceeded on their way till they reached the chateau of Castelneau. In passing through the lower hall they found a man, covered with dust, seated at a small table in the corner, for the great table at which the servants and retainers generally dined had been removed. He was eating voraciously, and was a tall, stout, merry-looking personage, with one eye blind and closed up. He was well dressed, however, as a courier, with his close-fitting blue jacket covered with gold lace, his large heavy riding-boots, weighing some twenty or thirty pounds, still upon his legs, his hat, with a flat band of feathers, thrown down upon the ground beside him, and his strong *couteau de chasse*, or short hunting-sword, in the buff belt over his shoulder.

The baron paused, eying him for a moment, and then asked, "Are you the courier who brought a letter to Mademoiselle de St. Morin not long ago?"

The man nodded his head, without rising or ceasing  
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his meal, saying, "I am, sir, the Count de Castelneau's courier, and mademoiselle's very humble servant."

"Then be so good," said the baron, somewhat sternly —for he did not like the man's tone—"then be so good as to follow us to the saloon directly. Mademoiselle has a question or two to ask you, my good friend."

"In a moment, in a moment, sir," replied the courier, in the easy, off-hand tone he had before used, at the same time swallowing two more enormous mouthfuls, and pouring out one half of a bottle of good Cahor wine into the horn-cup that stood by his side. "Sir, your good health—Mademoiselle, your good health;" and, setting down the cup upon the table after having drained it of its contents, he rose and followed the baron and Annette to the saloon in which she usually sat.

As soon as they were there; the baron fixed his eyes upon the courier with a frown, saying, with marked emphasis, "You seem to be a very saucy personage."

"I am, sir," replied the man, coolly; "never was a truer word spoken."

"Pray do you know," said the baron, "the way in which we treat saucy companions in Quercy?"

"No, indeed, sir," replied the courier; "may I ask how?"

"We tie them by the legs," said the baron, "and give them three dips head foremost in the Dordogne. Its waters are considered a sovereign cure for cool im-pudence; and if the Dordogne can't be met with, the Lot will do, or any pond in the province. Stay, stay! where are you going?"

"To get to my horse's back as fast as possible," replied the man, still moving towards the door; "for, if I remain here, I shall be drowned in three days."

"Stop!" said the baron, in a tone of authority: "if you do not, I will have you stopped in a way that you may not like. We do not suffer such gentry to go out of the province without curing them: but be so good as to answer this young lady and myself a few questions with plain and simple truth, and in civil language, and you may escape such ablutions."

"Very well, sir, very well," said the man, in an humble tone, "I will do as you command, if I can; but habit is a terrible thing—habit is a terrible thing—and habit and nature have been the ruin of me."

"Pray, sir, is this letter the count's writing?" de-

manded the baron, pointing with his finger to the letter.

“As I hope to escape the Dordogne,” replied the man, “I cannot tell. I neither taught him to write, nor saw him write it.”

“But who gave it to you? that is the question,” continued the baron.

“A gentleman calling himself the Count de Castelnau,” replied the courier, “and occupying the great hotel at the corner of the Rue St. Jacques.”

The baron looked at Annette, and Annette at the baron, for that was certainly the house which the count had occupied ever since his arrival in the capital.

“But tell me,” said the sweet voice of Annette, “of what complexion and appearance was the gentleman who gave you the letter, and called himself, as you say, the Count de Castelnau?”

“He is a tall, good-looking person, mademoiselle,” replied the courier; “not quite so tall and so lean as monsieur here, but somewhat paler in the face, with a bluish sort of beard, like the Turkish gentleman they talk about, and as grave and quiet as the same gentleman after he had cut off his last wife’s head.”

The description, though somewhat caricatured, was not to be mistaken, and the baron went on: “How long have you been in his service?”

“At the present moment,” replied the man, “I have been in his service just four days and five hours; that is to say, five hours before I set out from Paris, and four days upon the journey.”

“In fact, no time at all,” said the baron, “but merely hired to bring the letter down to this place.”

“Something like it, but not quite,” answered the man: “the count did want a courier, and sent for the first he could find; but he hired me to bring the letter, and to go back with the young lady, after which I am to be established courier in ordinary.”

Neither the baron nor Annette had any means of judging whether the man’s story was or was not true; and, moreover, when they came to ask themselves what reasonable cause there existed either for doubting the truth of the courier’s tale, or for suspecting the letter not to be genuine, they found it difficult to assign any, and both were forced to admit that the style being slightly constrained was by no means sufficient to warrant the supposition that the count had not written that

epistle. These thoughts were passing in the mind of both at the same moment; and the only farther questions which were put to the man were, "When did you quit Paris? and what is your name, my good friend?"

"On Monday, and my name is Pierre Jean," replied the man, adding nothing farther.

"That is your Christian name," said the baron; "what is your surname?"

"Pierre Jean," replied the man; "my only name is Pierre Jean; that is the name my godfathers and godmothers gave me at my baptism; and I should be sorry to throw it off because it is a little worn out about the knees. Pierre Jean is the name I have been known by all my life, and the only name I answer to; nor do I see any reason why a man who has never in life had more than two shirts should go about the world with the ostentatious frippery of three names upon his back."

"But what was your father's name?" demanded the baron, after thinking for a moment.

"Lord bless you, sir!" replied the man, "I never had a father; I am a great deal too poor to indulge in the luxury of ancestors. My mother's name I have forgotten, though she lived till I was some six years old; but as to a father, Heaven defend me! I never had such a thing that I know of; if I had, I might have been burdened with an inheritance, and brothers and sisters, and all sorts of things of that kind."

The baron smiled; for there was a drollery about the man's very impudence which was difficult to be resisted; and, after asking Annette whether she had any more questions to put, he told the courier that he might retire and finish his meal. In the course of a consultation with his young friend which followed, the baron compared some of the count's former letters with the one which had been received that day, and this comparison left no doubt upon their minds that the letter was perfectly genuine.

"Whatever may be my father's motive," said Annette, "now that I am satisfied it is from him, I must of course set off directly, though I have a feeling of dread in regard to Paris; a dislike to visit that great, wide, heartless place, which I cannot overcome."

"Sooner or later," replied the old nobleman, "you would have to visit it, beyond all doubt; and perhaps now, as well as at any other time, when wisely guided and

strongly protected, you have nothing to fear from its arts or its dangers. To one person, at least," added the baron, "your visit will give unsigned pleasure: you know that Ernest is now in the immediate neighbourhood of the capital."

The blood flew warmly into Annette's face, and she murmured something not very distinct about the pleasure she should have in meeting him again; and then added that she had better send down to Figeac for horses.

"It is impossible, my dear child," said the baron, "that you can go to-night; recollect that it is now past four o'clock. Before you could send and your messenger return, it would be much too late to set out, even if you could make the preparations necessary for your journey. Besides, you must not go alone. Who do you take with you?"

"Oh! I will take good Donnine," replied Annette, "and old Jerome, and another man with the carriage. Besides, there is this courier, you know."

The baron mused for a moment or two with a thoughtful and somewhat melancholy countenance; but in the end he said, with a sigh, "I am afraid it must be so. I would fain go with you, my dear young lady, but there are two or three circumstances which would render it wrong for me to do so: There is no danger of any kind, I believe, to be anticipated, and perhaps I may be enabled to do as much for you here as I could on the road."

Some more conversation of the same kind took place; and the exact course which Annette was to pursue from town to town was settled between her and the baron, whose experience in such matters was of course much greater than her own. This having been done, and a messenger despatched to Figeac to order horses for the ensuing day, the baron took leave of her and returned to Castel Nogent; and Annette, after having made every preparation for her departure at a very early hour on the following morning, retired to rest, but for some time was not successful in finding it. She was somewhat agitated, if not apprehensive: it was the first time that she had ever been called upon to act and direct, on any great occasion, and, in short, to exercise, without guidance or support, all those powers of mind which are necessary to every one, even in the common affairs of life. All this moved her considerably, and, when she fell asleep at length, her sleep was disturbed by dreams of the wild-

est and the most varied kind. Once or twice, however, through those dreams, the form of Ernest de Nogent appeared before her, and his voice sounded in her ear; and thus, after a time, the pleasanter images predominated, and she woke with a smile upon her countenance.

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### CHAPTER XXIII.

As every one must know who has tried it, and as every person who may happen to be as inexperienced as Annette will be more especially convinced of whenever they do try it, the appointment of a particular hour for departure is not the slightest guarantee whatsoever that the departure will take place for one or two hours afterward. Of this fact poor Annette soon became sensible. She had particularly expressed a wish that everything should be ready at a stated time; but nothing, of course, was ready at the time stated. Her own clothes took a considerable time to pack in the large heavy carriages of those days; the clothes of Donnine took longer still; and the clothes of Annette's maid took longer than all.

The only person who was prepared to mount and set out at a moment's notice was Pierre Jean, the two-shirted courier, who, to say the truth, was a braggart even in the matter of linen, having but one shirt, which was the one upon his back. Thus, not being very much encumbered with baggage, his external preparations were easily made; and the chateau being ever well supplied, he employed the time, which others were spending upon the packing of the carriage, in making internal preparations for the journey, which went on for a considerable length of time.

Before all was ready for Annette's departure, the good old Baron de Nogent himself appeared. He was accompanied by a servant on horseback, to whom he gave a letter, with orders to carry it to Figeac, in order to go by the ordinary post; but Pierre Jean was at his elbow while giving these directions, and, forgetting the lessons of the preceding evening, the courier instantly interfered, offering to carry the letter to Paris himself, and saying, "It will go more safely, depend upon it: the post is very doubtful nowadays."

"I would always rather trust an accredited scoundrel, sir, than an irresponsible one," said the baron; "and, judging from the time that you took to come hither, my letter, which I wish to reach Paris immediately, would take too long in your hands to answer my purpose."

"I came wonderfully fast, sir," said the man, in his usual cool, impudent tone. "I was detained on the road, it is true, but that was by a rascally wrong-headed beast of a horse, which threw me eleven times in nine miles. Every time I lighted upon my head, and, consequently, the argument which we held with each other, the question, the reply, and the rejoinder, took up a considerable length of time."

The baron looked at him for a moment thoughtfully, and then said, "You have other business to attend to than carrying letters, let me remind you; and it will be well for you to recollect, that upon your conduct during the journey with Mademoiselle de St. Morin will depend whether you are amply rewarded or very severely punished. The Count de Castelneau, as perhaps you know, is not a man to leave you an ear upon your head if any evil betide his ward by the way."

"Sir," replied the courier, making him a low bow, and winking his available eye, "I will take care of my ears: I will obey the orders I receive to a tittle, and I will have regard to all due cautions and proper counsels."

The baron then left him, with a few words more of warning, and proceeded to seek Annette, who in about half an hour entered the carriage and bade her good old friend adieu, while the wheels rolled her away from the calm and pleasant scenes of Castelneau, where she had spent so many a happy day.

It was a sweet, yellow, autumnal morning, and the low sun was casting long shadows from the towers and walls of the chateau, and from the magnificent old trees that appeared round about it, some of which—the yews, for instance, that stood in the western angle—were supposed to be coeval with itself. Annette looked forth from the window of the carriage, and she thought that there seemed—in the solemn and tranquil aspect of the place; in the cool morning light sleeping undisturbed on the green slopes and rounded forest tops; in those long shadows, moving as if they moved not, so slowly and deliberately, as the sun went on his way, that no eye could detect the change as they advanced—there seem-

ed in it all, she thought, a warning, an admonition to avoid the false glare and glitter, the hurrying gayety, the fluttering lightness of the scenes in which she was about to mingle, to love still what she had loved well and holily from infancy to womanhood, and to let her heart dwell with the calmer, higher, grander things of earth, till her spirit, ready and prepared, should take wing for the mighty realization of all bright hopes in heaven. To her mind all the things around her seemed to bid her farewell, calling upon her to return unchanged, as if it were the solemn voice of maternal love that spoke. There was something awful and sublime in the parting from those sweet scenes of her early youth, and she gazed with affectionate tenderness till the last pinnacle of the castle sunk behind the trees, and then, drawing back her head, she covered her eyes with her handkerchief and wept.

Donnine, on her part, did not understand such emotion at all ; for she could conceive nothing but joy and satisfaction to any one in going to rejoin her beloved master, even were it at the very greatest sacrifice. She liked Castelneau well enough as a residence, but she did sometimes think it rather dull ; she did sometimes regret the gay city in which many of her early days had been passed ; and, if the truth must be told, she was more glad to join the count there than she would have been anywhere else, forgetting that the light-heartedness of youth, which had seasoned the pleasures of the capital, had now passed away from her, and might have left them tasteless. She tried to comfort her young lady, however, to the best of her power ; but, alas ! when those who strive to console us under grief, or sooth us in agitation, are incapable of comprehending the very causes of our emotion, how tediously their words fall upon the ear ! what a grinning mockery is consolation without sympathy !

“ Hush, Donnine, hush ! ” said Annette, gently. “ You do not understand, my good Donnine. I am not grieved : only a little agitated at thus having to go, for the first time, into the world alone.”

“ Oh, you are frightened ! ” cried Donnine. “ Is that it, my dear lady ? Take courage, take courage ! The world is not so bad a place as people call it. I warrant you, you will not find a gay cavalier in all Paris who will not be right glad to pull off his hat to you and cast himself at your feet.”

"I think you know Paris well, Donnine," replied Annette, with a faint smile, knowing that as long as she appeared melancholy the good old lady would not cease to importune her.

"Know Paris well!" exclaimed Donnine. "Indeed do I! Many a pleasant hour have I spent there. Why, did I not bring you from Paris myself, mademoiselle, when you were an infant? If any one should know Paris, I should, I think, for there never passed a spring during thirty years that I did not spend four months in Paris. Alack, that I should not have seen it for well-nigh twenty years—no, not twenty: nineteen years come next April. It is a long time to be out of Paris;" and once having set out upon such an interesting subject, she went on without the assistance of an answer till Annette became more tranquil.

When the carriage stopped for the night, the small and unimportant difficulties and embarrassments of giving orders and directions in regard to everything for the first time in her life, occupied Annette's mind, and whiled away the slight shade of melancholy that still remained. She was one whose natural sweetness of disposition qualified her well to pass through all the minor obstacles that strew our path with ease and happiness to herself and others. There was no such thing as irritation in her nature, and she smiled at many things which would have grieved a more fretful disposition. Perhaps this might be one of the causes why her conduct and demeanour won so much upon everybody that surrounded her; so that the love and affection of all who knew her well followed her in all directions; and it was not possible for even new acquaintances to resist that peculiar charm which is always found in sweetness of temper and true kindness of heart.

Two or three times during the course of the evening, the bold and somewhat saucy courier who had borne her the letter from Paris presented himself under various pretences in the room where she was sitting, and the effect of her manner and tone even upon him was very evident. His countenance took a more respectful expression; he seemed to listen with pleasure to her voice; and when he quitted the room, it was remarked that he seemed in some degree more thoughtful than usual, falling once or twice into a deep reverie.

His companions of the road, however, observed that

from these meditations he always roused himself, rubbing his hands, and murmuring one particular exclamation, which was, “*Deux cens écus, et tout payé !*” Two hundred crowns, and everything paid ! Whatever was the course of argument of which this was the climax, the latter words seemed to him perfectly satisfactory and conclusive ; and he resumed forthwith his gay and nonchalant impudence, breaking his jests upon everybody, and never returning a very civil or serious answer to any question that was asked him.

Early on the following morning Annette was again upon her way from Limoges, and passing on through the hilly country which lies between Limoges and Morterol, she paused there at a little inn to take some refreshment. When Annette had dined and was just about to order fresh horses, her *soubrette* came in and whispered in her ear, with a face of some mystery and alarm, that she had heard the new courier making manifold inquiries as to whether two or three persons whom he had described had passed by Morterol. Annette, however, was not naturally timid : the suspicions regarding this man, which she had at first entertained she knew not well why, had by this time passed away, and she now only replied, “ He is asking for some of his friends, I suppose, Mariette.”

The girl seemed not so well satisfied as her mistress ; but, nevertheless, the horses were ordered, and the carriage proceeded on its way. Ahnette herself could not now help remarking that there was something extraordinary in Monsieur Pierre Jean’s proceedings. He rode hither and thither, passed and repassed the carriage, and certainly seemed as if he were anxiously looking for some thing or person that did not appear. The young lady naturally became somewhat anxious, and, calling him to the side of the carriage, she asked what was the matter. He replied that nothing was wrong, and that he was only looking for some friends of his, who were going on their way to Bordeaux ; but he thought they must have passed, he added, for they had quitted Paris at the same time as himself.

As every one must have experienced to their cost who has followed the road from Limoges to Châteauroux, this part of the journey, though the country is varied and beautiful, is generally tedious, from the slowness with which the vehicle is forced to proceed, con-

tinually climbing or descending steep hills, which prevent anything like rapid progression. Such was the case with Annette : there was no inn or town of any importance where she thought proper to sleep between Morterol and Argenton ; and as she was now a little apprehensive, from the somewhat strange conduct of the man who accompanied her, she saw the day wear away in this slow advance with some anxiety.

The sun was not far above the sky when she reached the old posthouse of Le Fay, and the postmaster, who was also an innkeeper, strove to persuade her to stay there. The aspect of the place, however, did not please her ; and calculating rightly that she would have time to reach Argenton before it was quite dark, she gave orders for proceeding quickly ; and in about an hour and a half she came within sight of that picturesque little town, with its rocks and vineyards, and the Creuse flowing on through the midst.

It must be confessed that it was a pleasant sight to Annette ; but, now that she had reached it in safety, she reproached herself for her fears, and was convinced that she had doubted the courier unjustly. It soon appeared that he had marked her suspicions ; for when the bustle of arrival was over, he presented himself and said, " You thought my riding about very strange, mademoiselle, and so it was ; but as I came down from Paris I heard, about Le Fay and Morterol, that there was a gang of robbers on the road, and I was afraid of what might happen."

Annette answered sweetly and gently ; and after asking the man a few more questions, she dismissed him for the night. On leaving her presence, he again fell into one of those reveries which we have before remarked, but soon resumed his gayety. The young lady, however, set out again from Argenton on the following day with a mind more at rest, and everything passed calmly and quietly as she proceeded through the varied and beautiful country which lies between Argenton and Lottier, although the day was somewhat dull, and the sky gray and heavy. After passing Lottier, as the morning advanced, a fine drizzling rain began to fall, and the country changed its character altogether, and presented those wide wastes of moorish common land which border for several leagues the great forest of Châteauroux. The absence of the sun rendered the

southeasterly wind cold and chilly, and the prospect was dull and cheerless to the eye. A little farther on, however, the road entered the forest of Châteauroux, and some fine scenery would have been presented among the glens had it not been for the cold and dreary grayness of the atmosphere, which, though it did not prevent one from seeing up the long avenues of the forest, and down into the deep dells, gave every object a dark and cheerless aspect, and made the deer, which every here and there were seen either standing at gaze or bounding swiftly across, seem like the ghosts of some of the former tenants of the wood slaughtered by the hounds in ages long ago.

As the carriage rolled slowly along through the sandy road, Annette thought she saw once or twice something like a human form at a distance; but as she knew that Châteauroux could not be far off, she did not entertain any apprehension, and calculated fully upon reaching Vierzon that night. At length, however, in a detached part of the wood, which—though now entirely separate from the rest, and known by the name of the Bois de Nihéne—was evidently a portion of the great forest itself, just as the carriage had reached the bottom of a somewhat deep descent, it was suddenly surrounded by five or six men on horseback. Two placed themselves at the heads of the horses, several others watched the two men-servants who accompanied the vehicle, and another, riding up to the side, exclaimed, "*De par le roi!*"

Annette had heard those words before; but quite certain of never having in her life done, said, or thought anything which could call down upon her the royal indignation, she rapidly compared the appearance of the man who spoke with that of Pierre Morin, and such of his followers as she had seen from the windows of Castel Nogent, and she concluded at once that the official character which these men pretended to bear was falsely assumed.

"If it is my purse you want, gentlemen," she said, calling all her courage to her aid, "if it is my purse you want, here it is at your service; but I beseech you to let me go on to Châteauroux as fast as possible; for—"

"You mistake, mademoiselle, you mistake," replied the man, in a rough tone: "we are no robbers; this is no robbery; it is an *enlèvement de police*. We have war-

rant for what we do. What made you think we were robbers?"

"Because you are dressed so differently from the police that I have seen," replied Annette: "but if you be really officers of police, you must be making a mistake. I have never done anything, or dreamed of doing anything, which should give cause of complaint."

"We are not making a mistake, mademoiselle," replied the man: "we know you quite well, and all about you. Your name is Mademoiselle de St. Morin, and you come from Castelneau. You are on your way to Paris, but we will take you by a shorter road than Châteauroux."

"Then I have been very much deceived," said Annette, looking up and down the road for the courier Pierre Jean, who was nowhere to be seen; "though I still do not understand, if you be of the police, what was the use of deceiving me from Castelneau hither."

"I have nothing to do with deceiving you," replied the man, in a sharp tone; "but all I have to say is, with me you must come; and you are to consider yourself a prisoner from this moment."

Annette felt an inclination to weep, but by a strong effort she kept down the tears, and merely bowed her head, saying, "Of course I must submit."

The man who had spoken to her then dismounted from his horse, gave the bridle to one of those who followed, and, after addressing a few words to the postillions, returned to the side of the carriage, opened the door, and took his seat opposite to Annette. The carriage then began to move forward, surrounded by the men on horseback, till it reached a place where the road divided into two, and a finger-post appeared inscribed on the one side with the words "To Châteauroux," while the other bore "To St. Vincent."

The latter road was by far the narrower and the worse of the two, but up it the postillions turned their horses' heads, and shortly afterward the carriage stopped at a little hamlet where four horses were waiting. They were ready harnessed, but after a very different fashion from the horses of the post-houses. As soon as the carriage paused, the beasts which had drawn Annette thither were taken off and the others put on, and in place of postillions a coachman mounted the box. These proceedings, more than anything which had yet

passed, convinced Annette that she was really in the hands of the police ; for she knew that it was contrary to law for any one but a king's officer to change from the royal post on any account, after having commenced a journey in that particular manner.

She summoned courage, as soon as the vehicle again began to move, to inquire of the person who sat opposite to her what was the nature of the offence with which she was charged. The man smiled at her simplicity, and replied, "Are you not well aware that I know no more than you ? You will hear all the particulars soon enough, my pretty lady. Do not be afraid that your offence will be concealed from you."

There was an unpleasant familiarity in the man's manner which displeased and frightened Mademoiselle de St. Morin, and that familiarity increased rather than diminished as they proceeded on their way, till, exerting the native dignity of her character, when he dared on one occasion to address her with impudent levity, she gave him a severe rebuke that sunk him into sullen silence.

She particularly remarked, however, a fact which seemed to her very strange, namely, that their journey was conducted by roads which were anything but good, and that in the whole of their progress, during four entire days, they never entered one single large city. On the fifth day, indeed, they came to the small place called Malesherbes, which was the largest town, if it could so be called, which Annette had yet seen since she quitted Argenton. Their repose for the night had previously been in small inns of a dreary and desolate character, and during the first two or three days she had met with no very kind or careful treatment ; but as she drew near Paris, the conduct of the leader of the party in whose custody she was underwent a change : he became more attentive, and asked once or twice whether she had everything to make her comfortable.

From Malesherbes the carriage took a road on the left of that towards Fontainebleau, and after going on for four or five hours, it stopped before some iron gates to the right. One of the men on horseback dismounted and opened the gates, and passing along an avenue nearly a mile in length, the vehicle rolled on till it stopped before an elegant building in a modern style of architecture, forming a small country house or chateau, with a porch supported by four Ionic pillars.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

It was in the little saloon at Chanteloup, which was particularly appropriated to the Duchess of Choiseul, and which, by the taste and kindness of her husband, was filled with inestimable pictures, each small in size, but each well deserving that often misapplied epithet, exquisite, that the lady of the mansion and her nephew were seated, some seven or eight weeks after the visit to Versailles which we have commemorated in another chapter. Ernest de Nogent—as was often his custom with an aunt that he loved—had seated himself on a stool at the feet of the duchess and, was gazing up in her face, while she, looking down upon him, was asking with an air slightly playful, though with a certain touch of sadness in it too,

“And so, Ernest, you have leave of absence for three months?”

“Yes, my dear aunt,” he said, “I have that leave, thanks to my most kind uncle, I am sure, though he will not own it.”

“And so, Ernest,” continued the duchess, in the same meditative tone, and gazing on him with the same look, “and so you are going down with all speed to spend your holyday at Castle Nogent?”

“True, dear aunt,” he replied; “where could I be better than by my father’s side?”

“And so, Ernest,” proceeded the duchess, without a change of manner, “the end of all this matter is, you are in love!”

Ernest looked down thoughtfully on the floor for a moment or two, and then turned his eyes again to the duchess, replying frankly, “Perhaps, my dear aunt, it is so.”

“Alas! poor youth,” exclaimed the duchess. “Did you consider well, when you undertook to do this rash thing of falling in love, all the griefs, and the discomforts, and anxieties, and emotions which you have yet to feel, and how often you may meet with bitter disappointment? and did you recollect all the pains and troubles of affection? I do not see what young men,

with all the pleasures of life and youth glowing round about them, have to do with love. They should leave it to old women like myself. We are the only fit people for it, Ernest, you may depend upon it, whatever the world may think."

"Why, my dear aunt, have you not often told me that you married my uncle when you were a mere child, and that you have always loved him throughout life!"

"Ay, Ernest," replied the duchess; "but I loved him first as a child, and then as a young woman, and now as an old woman, and I feel that the last is the deepest and the brightest after all, Ernest."

"Well, then, my dear aunt," replied Ernest, "I intend to follow the same plan as near as possible. To love her now as a young man, and to love her hereafter as an old one."

"Well, I suppose you must have your own way," replied the duchess, laughing; "but tell me who this Mademoiselle de St. Morin is. Who was her father?"

Ernest was about to reply very truly that he had never inquired, and knew nothing about the matter; but at that moment one of the attendants entered the room, bearing a letter, which he presented to the young officer. "Your groom, sir," he said, "has brought this from Paris post haste, though it came by the ordinary courier, seeing that it is marked *with speed, with urgent speed.*"

"It is my father's hand," said Ernest, taking it; "what can be the matter?" and immediately imagination and affection, as he recollects the delicate state of his father's health, called up a thousand pale fears from the bottom of his heart, and made them settle in his cheek.

"Open the letter, Ernest, open the letter!" cried the duchess; "we can encounter realities always better than fancies!"

Ernest tore open the letter and read aloud. "My dear boy," it went, "I write to you in haste, to tell you of an event which may be of importance, but which may be of none. While I was yesterday visiting our sweet neighbour at Castelneau, a courier arrived bearing a letter to Mademoiselle de St. Morin, signed by her guardian, and bidding her instantly to set out to join him in Paris. There was something in the writing and the style difficult to be defined, which made the dear

girl and myself suspect that the letter was not genuine; the appearance of the courier, too, who will give himself no other name than Pierre Jean, was in every respect against him; but we could elicit nothing from him but matter which tended to confirm the genuineness of the letter. As such a call to join her guardian was by no means improbable, and as we could not discover a likely motive why any one should attempt to deceive her, it is determined that she shall set out this morning. An apprehension, however, rests upon my mind which I cannot shake off, and I therefore send you these lines, that you may instantly communicate with Monsieur de Castelneau, and learn whether the letter be of his writing or not. I despatch this by the ordinary courier, as he will arrive in Paris long before Mademoiselle de St. Morin; and I will only add that she goes by the way of Châteauroux and Orleans."

"The villains!" exclaimed Ernest de Nogent, as he concluded the letter, "the villains! But I must fly to Monsieur de Castelneau directly."

"Is it not his own doing, think you?" demanded the duchess, somewhat surprised at her nephew's agitation. "Indeed, you lovers puzzle me, Ernest. Why should you be so furious at the idea of seeing your fair lady so soon? or why should you think that Monsieur de Castelneau has not sent for her?"

"Because he pledged himself not to do so," replied Ernest de Nogent; "because he vowed that he would sooner go to the Bastile. Oh, no, no, my dear aunt! You do not understand: I must fly to him directly."

"Better fly to the police, my dear nephew," said the duchess. "If you are quite sure that somebody has been practising a fraud on this young lady, the police is the best resource."

"Alas! alas!" replied Ernest, "the police here are of no avail. It is the king, my dear aunt. It is the king who has been practising the fraud. What can the police do there!"

"Little, little will they do indeed!" replied the duchess, now comprehending the whole matter. "Little will they do, though they ought to afford protection against his creatures as well as against all other evil doers. But fly to the Count de Castelneau: consult with him: I will speak with Monsieur de Choiseul; and he will—I know he will—do all he can. No, Ernest, no! he will

not suffer the king to violate all human rights and decencies so long as he is minister, I am sure."

"I would fain not embarrass him with such a task as this must be, my dear aunt," replied Ernest de Nogent. "I will find these people soon, depend upon it; and when I do, I will treat them in such a way as may make me need that protection, which he shall then give me if he will. No, it were better for him not to meddle with it at present, except in affording me any tidings he can obtain."

"His own dignity," replied the duchess, "must be consulted too, Ernest. This conduct has gone on too long. It has grieved him bitterly, most severely; and, for my part, I would much rather see him strip himself of all his honours and all his power, and sit down calmly here to the unmixed enjoyment of fine feelings and high tastes, than be the minister of the greatest kingdom in Europe, swaying the destinies of empires, and yet powerless either to restrain and guard against the shameless, the disgraceful depravity of the court, in which he stands next to the king, or to guard the people of the realm from such indecent outrage. Yes, Ernest, yes, I would rather see him plain Stephen of Choiseul, surrounded by a few high and noble friends, than on such conditions prime-minister of France, with all the statesmen of Europe bowing before him."

"I doubt you not in the least, my dear aunt," replied Ernest; "but in asking you not to take any notice of this affair at present, I am guided by selfish motives too. I fear that if the duke do interfere, the king may be led to pursue even more violent and unjustifiable measures. I see, now that I think more coolly, that the object contemplated at present must be to bring Mademoiselle de St. Morin to Paris against the count's inclination. They will never certainly dare venture upon anything else. Monsieur de Castelneau will, I know, send her back again at once; but if we irritate the king, he may give a positive order that she is to remain in Paris. Tell my uncle, then, all that has happened, but tell him what I have said upon the subject: he will judge best how to act, both for the interests of all persons concerned and for his own honour. We may well rely upon his judgment."

"Indeed, indeed we may," replied the duchess, "for where shall we find in Europe a judgment equal to his?"

Thus spoke the Duchess of Choiseul ; and though it may seem strange that such sentiments should exist in the bosom of a Frenchwoman of that age towards her husband, yet her words were but very, very faint symbols of the feelings which that high and devoted heart contained.

Without waiting for any farther discussion, Ernest de Nogent took leave of his aunt, and mounting his horse, rode onward towards Paris as fast as he could go, calculating by the way what would be the best course for the count to pursue ; whether to hurry on from the capital towards Castelnau in order to undecise Annette and send her back again to her calm home, or to allow her to come to Paris, and then bid her return immediately. But Ernest de Nogent himself was calculating, as we have already seen, upon false premises. He knew not to what a daring extent the vices of Louis had carried him since he himself had quitted the post which he once held at the palace, or he would have seen from the first moment that it was most necessary to keep Annette afar from the immediate influence of the court. Not that he ever doubted for one moment what would be the conduct of Annette herself under any circumstances in which she might be placed ; but, had he known all, he would have known that she might be subjected to all that is revolting, painful, and grievous to a pure heart ; she might be forced to mingle with scenes which were in themselves pollution, and hear words which are a disgrace to utter or to listen to.

The state of the royal power in France at that moment presented a very curious phenomenon. In the heart of the court despotism was almost complete. The king's will was law to those who immediately surrounded him : there was nothing so arbitrary, so rash, or so violent that he dared not do within a certain distance of the capital. Paris, in fact, was France : the adjacent provinces were mere dependencies, and the farther provinces only remote colonies, where the royal authority was but faintly felt. So much, indeed, had this become the case, that when an offending nobleman was ordered to absent himself fifty miles from Paris, it was called being sent into exile ; and in common parlance, no distinction was made between exile from the court and exile from the country.

In a remote province, those acts of personal tyranny

dared not be done which were daily enacted in the capital; and if ever the monarch was tempted to stretch the arm of despotic power to grasp some object at a distance from Paris, the ministers of his pleasure were forced to have recourse to artifice as well as violence in order to bring the victim within the immediate vortex of the court. Nor did artifice and violence always succeed; for it is well known that Choiseul himself, in the early part of his career, suddenly removed from the court one of his own relations to guard her from pollution; and, having placed a wide space between her and the king, set his despotic power at defiance. That, however, was at a time when the passions of Louis were under some restraint from a remaining sense of propriety; but within the last few years of his reign, since the period when Ernest de Nogent had quitted the royal household to serve in the field, all ties of morality, religion, and even decency, had been cast away; and it was very wrongly that the young officer fancied *Annette* might be easily removed even after she had arrived in Paris.

He was revolving all these matters in his mind as he rode along, but not suffering his thoughts to delay him in his progress, when, not far from Fromenteau, he was passed by another horseman, galloping at as rapid a pace as himself. Ernest de Nogent took no notice, and did not draw his bridle; but the moment after they had crossed each other, he heard a voice exclaim, "Monsieur de Nogent, Monsieur de Nogent."

Ernest checked his horse unwillingly, and looked round to see who it was that called; when, with a feeling of satisfaction, he beheld the face of one from whom he hoped to obtain some information, if not some assistance. He accordingly turned his horse completely, and rode up to the side of the other cavalier, who had only halted as if to say something to him at a distance.

"Good-morrow, Monsieur Morin," said the young gentleman: "did you wish to speak with me?"

"Merely to ask whither away so fast, Monsieur de Nogent," replied Pierre Morin. "I think I may want to speak with you before the day be over, and I wish to know where you are to be found."

"Can you not tell me, Monsieur Morin, what you wish to say now?" said Ernest. "Where I shall be in the evening I cannot at all tell. My mind is troubled

with business of some importance, and I think that perhaps you may know something of the matter."

"How should I know anything of the matter?" said Pierre Morin, with a meaning smile.

"Because," replied Ernest, "you are said to know something of every one's actions, though men know not how you obtain such an insight."

"Very easily indeed," replied Pierre Morin, who, it is remarked, was somewhat vain, and not altogether unreasonably so, of the skill with which he procured information. "It is scarcely possible, Monsieur de Nogent, for a man to be nearly twenty years the confidential agent and adviser of two lieutenants-general of police, and during nearly ten to exercise the principal power under them, without knowing something of every man and every family in France. Either they themselves come under our hands, or their servants, or their friends, or their enemies; and whether it be themselves, or friends, or enemies, we always learn something, so that it needs but a good memory and a quick imagination to know a great deal, and to divine a great deal more."

"There are other ways also, I suspect, Monsieur Morin," replied Ernest; "but pray, if you do know anything of the matter which now busies me, let me hear it, and give me your advice and assistance."

"There are other means, as you say," replied Pierre Morin. "Our good friends, the *mouchards*, give us some aid; but their information would be worth little or nothing unless it were well digested after it is received. However, you are right in another respect. I think I do know something of the matter that troubles you, though probably less than you do; but I was just now going down to speak to the Duc de Choiseul upon the subject, and inquire what can be done with safety."

"You will not find the duke," said Ernest; "he is at Versailles."

"The duke quitted Versailles," replied Pierre Morin, looking at his watch, "at five minutes after one. His carriage is by this time just rolling in through the gates of Chanteloup; and by the time I get there, he will have washed his hands in the little cabinet to the left of the picture-gallery, he will have taken a glass of Madeira and a biscuit, and have talked five minutes with Madame de Choiseul, so that he will just then be wri-

ting a letter to Monsieur de Gontaut in Corsica. But for the matter in hand," he continued, more quickly; "that which affects you is news from Castelneau, is it not? Since you received the letter that alarmed you, I have made some inquiries, though not as many as I could wish. The man Pierre Jean has been employed because he is a bold villain as well as a cunning one; but there have been more sent down since to second him: six, I understand, of the lowest and most detestable scum of the court. They have dared to take upon them the name of the police, and for that they shall be punished, whatever comes of it; but we must be quick in our motions, for by this time they are half way to Paris."

As Pierre Morin spoke, a dark and heavy cloud fell over the face of Ernest de Nogent, and he gazed bitterly upon the ground, seeing that the danger was much greater than he had at first supposed, and revolving with agony of mind all the griefs, perils, and anxieties which might beset poor Annette. If it were the intention of the king, he thought, merely to bring Annette, in the first instance, to the house of her guardian in Paris, he would have contented himself with the forged summons which had been sent, and would not have despatched so numerous a body of men, assuming the name of police. His heart burned within him; and feelings at that moment took possession of his bosom which would have been termed treasonable by almost every man at the court of France.

"Oh! that this monster had been but a private man," he thought, "that with my own right hand I might have punished him as he deserves."

Pierre Morin marked the expression of his countenance, and very easily divined his feelings.

"Come, come, Monsieur de Nogent," he said, "do not give way! Neither be rash nor despair. All will go well, depend upon it; but we must manage this thing delicately: all will go well, I tell you, if we do not by some evil chance make a mistake in the game that we are playing. I will proceed to Chanteloup; you go back to Paris; but neither you nor the count must think of taking one step till you see me. I will join you soon, and give you information, for I am not a little interested in this matter as well as yourself. But stay," he added, after a moment, "stay. I had forgotten; you

must neither mention to the count that you have seen me, nor let him know that I take any part in the affair. Do not utter my name either to him or to any one else, remember; for in all things I must act but officially, or we shall spoil the whole business. There is nobody shall take the name of the police in France unpunished without due authority, and in chastising those who have done so, we may well set the lady free. Mention, then, not my name to any one; but in two hours and a half meet me at the hotel of Clermont Ferrand, and I will tell you more; but, mind, on no account must you commit me."

Thus saying, he turned his horse again and rode on; and Ernest de Nogent pursued his way, thinking, "It is strange what the habit of observation will do. This man has seen me but once with Annette, and yet he seems to have discovered at once how deeply I am interested in her and all that concerns her. It is odd, too, Annette seemed to know him; and he declares he is interested in the affair as well as myself! Yet what connexion can there be between a person in his situation and one in hers? He is evidently not a man of rank or birth; perhaps he may have been a tutor in her family."

While Ernest thus thought and rode on upon his way, Pierre Morin, mounted on a strong and exceedingly swift horse, lost no time in reaching Chanteloup. Of the persons whom he found in the courtyard, some were employed in unharnessing four splendid horses from the carriage of the duke, some gazing idly at what the others were doing, but all bowed low and humbly before the deputy of the lieutenant of police, and hastened to give him an answer to his inquiries. Pierre Morin found that his nice calculation of the prime-minister's movements had been a little erroneous; the roads between Chanteloup and Versailles had been heavy. The carriage of the duke had been delayed for a few minutes by some other obstruction; and the consequence was, that the letter to Corsica had not been yet begun, and the biscuit, glass of Madeira, and conversation with the duchess were not yet concluded. Indeed, that conversation had lasted longer than it usually did, for Madame de Choiseul had, as we have seen, matters to relate which detained her husband from his other affairs.

It was announced to the duke, while still listening to

his wife's narrative, that Monsieur Morin waited to see him, and he answered, "Take him into my cabinet. I will be with him in a moment. On my life, dear Louise," he said, "it would not surprise me if Morin had come about this very business; for he told me last night that the man Pierre Jean, who sticks like a burr to the skirts of the court, at once mean, unsightly, and injurious, had set out from Paris some time ago on a mission which he believed to be not of the very best description. I will speak with him at once, and let you know what he says. I am sick to the death at all this infamy, and I see that worse is coming still."

Thus saying, he quitted the duchess, and proceeded to the cabinet where Pierre Morin was waiting. The agent of police bowed down to the ground before the prime-minister, and the minister welcomed him with a gracious inclination, pointing to a seat, and bidding him sit down, without any assumption of state and dignity, such as the Duc de Choiseul might very likely have displayed in dealing with a man of less worth but higher rank: for the character of Pierre Morin was well known to him, and he was aware that such truth and honesty as his were seldom found combined with so much skill, shrewdness, and knowledge of human nature.

"Well, my good friend," he said, "what brings you to Chanteloup to-day? I trust that nothing new has gone amiss."

"That, my lord, you must decide," replied Pierre Morin: "I come to you for information in regard to what has really taken place, and I hope we shall find that it is not amiss."

"Perhaps I may divine the nature of your errand, Monsieur Morin," replied the duke; "but I would fain hear, in the first instance, what it is from your own mouth."

"It were best so to do, my lord," replied the officer; "and, if I might take a great liberty, I would ask that you answer my questions without going farther than the mere matter of them, and without showing me any of your own views; for we may both be called upon hereafter to give an account of what we say upon this subject, and as neither you nor I will tell a lie, we may as well have the truth convenient."

"Well, well," said the duke; "propose your questions, Monsieur Morin: you are accustomed to interrogato-

ries, and I thank you for your hint. The rest I will judge of as we proceed."

Pierre Morin then went on to detail, very briefly, but with a more accurate knowledge than any other man in the whole kingdom possessed except the actors in the transaction, the whole particulars of what had befallen Annette, taking great care to avoid the slightest mention of the king's name, or to hint that any higher person could be engaged in the affair than those who had actually appeared on the scene.

When he concluded the detail, the duke demanded, without other comment, "Well, Monsieur Morin, who do you think is the instigator of this affair?"

"Nay, my lord," replied Pierre Morin, "that I do not know; and, to say the truth, I do not at present intend to inquire; but—"

"Right, right!" answered the duke, after a moment's thought. "I understand you; you are right; there is but that one way! Go on with your questions."

"Well, then, my lord," continued Pierre Morin, "you see here is a flagrant breach of the law committed; and, moreover, an insult of the grossest kind offered to the police, unless your lordship or some of the ministers authorized these men to make this arrest, and to call themselves by a false name. May I ask if you did so?"

"Certainly not," replied the duke, with a smile; "and I can at once answer that none of the ministers gave such authority, which is contrary to every principle of law and justice. We should merit, and doubtless incur, the most severe indignation of the king were we to countenance such things."

"Very well, then, my lord," replied Pierre Morin, "my course is very clear. I have already informed the lieutenant-general, my chief, that certain persons of bad repute have been passing themselves off for his agents, and making arrests as if under his authority, and he immediately gave me orders for apprehending them; but I thought it best to make sure that the matter had not taken place under lawful authority. As I now find," he continued, with marked emphasis, "that your lordship and all the ministers of the crown are ignorant of the whole transaction, I shall at once lodge all the parties concerned in the Châtelet, putting them *au secret* till such time as we can gain full information as to their designs."

"An excellent plan, Monsieur Morin," replied the duke: "an excellent plan. But what do you intend to do with the young lady?"

"On that I will take your lordship's advice," replied Pierre Morin. "It might be best to send her back at once into Quercy; but, poor thing, she has had a long and fatiguing journey already, and—"

"You seem to take a great interest in her, Monsieur Morin," said the duke, suddenly.

"I do, indeed, my lord," replied Pierre Morin; "and so would your lordship if you saw and knew her. She is as beautiful and sweet a creature as ever you beheld."

"And her name is very like your own, Monsieur Morin," answered the duke.

Pierre Morin made him a low bow, out of which it was impossible to extract any definite meaning, adding, at the same time, "Your lordship does me a great deal of honour; but I am merely a simple *roturier*, and neither a noble nor a saint, as the two first syllables of her name imply. But still, what would your lordship have me do with her?"

"Hark ye, Morin," said the duke, speaking in a low voice. "Send her back again at once, without a moment's delay. I would protect her to the best of my power here, but there are some things in which I am powerless."

"Only in small things, my lord," replied Pierre Morin; "in great ones, none so powerful: for the king said yesterday to the Count de Lude, as they were walking under the orangery, that if all the other ministers were to oppose your opinion, and all the statesmen in Europe were to back them, he would take your judgment against theirs, and feel sure of success."

The duke looked pleased, but replied, with a meaning smile, "Why, Monsieur Morin, Monsieur Morin, how do you learn all the king's private conversation? You have not, surely, any of the gentlemen whom you term your good friends the *mouchards* near the royal person?"

"We have them everywhere, my lord," replied Pierre Morin, with a reverential bow: "ay, and in all classes. It would be very disrespectful, indeed, to his majesty not to pay him the same attention we pay to the rest of his subjects. Besides, as we have few opportunities of

asking his will, how should we know it upon slighter occasions if we did not give heed to such casual indications of his pleasure? The truth also is, my lord, that the *bureau de police* is in fact the Temple of Fame which one of our poets has been writing about, and every one who has a little piece of information to dispose of carries it thither direct."

"It is a strange system," said the duke, musing: "a strange system, indeed, Monsieur Morin; and I cannot think a good one."

"Neither you nor I framed it, my lord," replied Pierre Morin. "You found it as it is: it made me what I am. You must use it, I must follow it. Besides, it is like one of those powder-carts that I have seen following the army, on which the tired men sometimes jump up to ride, neither the most convenient nor the safest conveyance, but yet better than none."

"Pray Heaven it do not explode, and blow us all to atoms!" said the duke.

"What will be, will be!" answered Pierre Morin, with a true French shrug of indifference; and adding, "As I find your lordship is not at all cognizant of those men's conduct, I will proceed against them in the usual course," he bowed low and retired.

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## CHAPTER XXV.

THE Hôtel de Clermont Ferrand, at the time we speak of, was vacant as a residence, at least for anything else than rats and mice. The proprietor was a young man then absent with the army: the woman put in to keep the place in order, who was the widow of an old porter, was absent gossiping with her neighbours the greater part of the day, and slept at the house of her daughter, at some distance from that place. She vowed that it was impossible to rest there, on account of the long-tailed denizens whom we have mentioned, and who, according to her account, danced all night over her head rather in the measure of a gavot than of a minuet.

It was sometimes convenient for the agents of the police to have a place where they could meet with a sus-

picious friend, somewhat less dangerous to their guest than the central bureau. To meet this contingency in his own case, Pierre Morin had communicated his views to the good lady, who made him a most reverend courtesy ; and, being assured of a certain piece of money, and the protection of the police year by year, she gave her good friend a key of the mansion, and took care never to present herself on inexpedient occasions.

About five o'clock on the day of Pierre Morin's visit to the Duke of Choiseul, Ernest de Nogent entered the court of the hotel we have mentioned, and applied himself in vain to various doors for admission. Not one of them either yielded to his hand or returned the slightest answer, except a murmuring echo, which spoke of emptiness. He looked at his watch ; he was exactly to his time ; and, though he was suffering under impatience—that disease which renders men more inconsiderate than probably any other—he did bethink himself that Pierre Morin might be kept by some other engagements a few minutes longer than the time he had appointed. He therefore walked up and down the court, determined to wait the event ; and in about ten minutes the figure of him he expected suddenly appeared under the archway. Ernest was advancing to speak to him ; but another man suddenly came up, touched Monsieur Morin on the arm, and addressed him in a low tone and with an important face.

Pierre Morin paused and listened, and then demanded, “ Ha ! When ? ”

“ Two hours ago ! ” replied the man, who appeared by his dress to be either a writing or a drawing master. “ I saw him myself as he came out.”

“ Which way did he take ? ” demanded Pierre Morin : “ to his father's house, or to the south ? ”

“ To neither,” answered the stranger : “ he went home first to the lodging which he hired three months ago ; but then he shaved and dressed himself, and, getting into a *chaise de poste*, rolled away to Versailles.”

“ Ha ! ” said Pierre Morin : “ then, my good friend, your business is to go after him. Tell our friend the marquis to let me hear all that passes within the palace ; but do you watch where he goes yourself when he quits the king, and let me know something more at the grand bureau by eight o'clock.”

All this was said so low that Ernest, who had taken a

turn to the other side of the court as soon as he saw how busily Pierre Morin was engaged, heard not a word; and the disguised emissary of the police, as soon as he had received the above directions, glided quietly away without making any reply.

No sooner was he gone than Pierre Morin advanced to the young officer, saying, "I have now obtained all the information I wanted. The young lady is within twenty miles of Paris, and she shall be free before midnight. What says the Count de Castelneau to the contents of your letter?"

"I have not seen him," replied Ernest de Nogent; "for before I arrived—some ten minutes, the servant said—he had set out for Versailles, having been summoned thither by a special messenger from the king."

"Ha!" said Pierre Morin, "that is strange, too! They would keep him out of the way. But what is to be done with the young lady? that is the question: whether to bring her to Paris to his hotel at once, or to send her back to Castelneau."

"Oh, send her back, send her back!" exclaimed Ernest de Nogent. "In Heaven's name keep her not here, if you have any interest in her fate."

"I have, indeed, young gentleman," replied Pierre Morin: "more than you know of. But, though I can set her free, it is impossible for me to guard her back again to Castelneau, as I could wish to do. I cannot be absent myself without distinct orders. I cannot spare more than two men to go such a distance, and only one of those can be of my own people, while the people who are pursuing her may be many, and certainly will be unscrupulous."

"Let me, then, undertake that part," replied Ernest de Nogent. "You set her free. Give me two men to help me—my own servant, myself, and a man I can hire will make five—and I will answer with my life she shall reach Castelneau in safety."

Pierre Morin smiled. "I fear it may be dangerous for you," he said, "in more ways than one; but, however, I must have an hour or two to decide, for I have other persons to consult. Such things as these cannot be done without counsel, and I have many things to think of and to do. It is now five of the clock; meet me at ten to-night, with the two men you speak of, in the grounds of the small chateau of Michy. Do you know it?"

"No, I do not," replied Ernest de Nogent, "but I will easily find it: where does it lie?"

"Between Longueville and Malesherbes," replied Pierre Morin: "make for Longueville in the first place, then ride on straight before you as if you were going to Puiselet, and take the first turning to your right. On your left you will find a gate; it is the first gate you come to. Go in there, and a little farther on you will see the chateau. Do not go near it, however, but keep among the trees to the left. Take no notice of anything you see or hear till I come, for people may be passing up and down the road. Draw your horses among the trees, and keep them as much screened as possible."

"Oh, I will manage all that," replied Ernest de Nogent; "I am a soldier, you know, and accustomed to such things. You will join me there, then; but how can we convey Mademoiselle de St. Morin back?"

"I will bring a carriage with me," replied the commissary, "only you be punctual to your hour and careful in your movements. These are matters in which slight mistakes ruin great enterprises."

"Trusting to you entirely," replied Ernest de Nogent, "I will follow your directions to the letter; but we must all make haste if you have other persons to see in Paris, for our time is very short, and the way long, I think."

"Oh, no," replied the commissary, "'tis not seven leagues. Quick horses and willing minds, and we shall accomplish the matter easily."

Ernest asked him to repeat once more the directions he had given, and then left him to make hasty preparations for his journey. Those preparations, however, required consideration; for he had, in the first place, to engage some one to assist him; and, in the next place, he had to communicate by letter to the Count de Castelnau both what had occurred and the course he was about to pursue. When he came to perform the latter part of the task, he found it much more difficult to execute than he had anticipated; for in the eagerness which he had felt for the deliverance of her he loved, he had totally forgotten to ask himself what title he had to interfere in the matter. He now recollects, however, that the title might be questioned by the Count de Castelnau himself, so that it was with some embarrass-

mént, and after considerable thought, that he at length accomplished the undertaking.

He told the count then that the letter from his father, which he enclosed, had reached him at Chanteloup, and that his absence from Paris at the time of its arrival had unfortunately prevented him from communicating it before the count's departure for Versailles. He then went on to say that he had received information from good authority, that, after having been induced to set out from Castelneau by a spurious letter, Mademoiselle de St. Morin had been subjected to a false arrest, and was even then detained in the neighbourhood of Paris. Under these circumstances, he added—avoiding all mention either of Pierre Morin's part in the affair, or of his own suspicions regarding the king—that he had determined to endeavour to liberate Mademoiselle de St. Morin at once, and would immediately communicate the result to Monsieur de Castelneau. He apologized for acting in the matter upon his own responsibility, but said that he had many reasons, which the count could well conceive, for seeking to free Mademoiselle de St. Morin with the least possible delay.

This task being accomplished, and the letter having been left at the house of the count, Ernest next proceeded to ensure the assistance of an old soldier, who had formerly served in his own regiment. Horses also were to be hired; but, being thoroughly acquainted with the city of Paris, and being himself well known and respected, that part of the undertaking was easily effected, and by half past seven o'clock he was in the saddle and on the road to Longueville. He passed through that little village after a quick ride in a dark night, at about a quarter before ten, and then proceeding somewhat more slowly, he followed exactly the directions of Pierre Morin, watching all the turnings narrowly as they had been described to him. The way, indeed, seemed much longer than he had been told it was; and he was beginning to fancy that he must have made a mistake, when by the very faint light that still existed in the air he perceived a gate upon the left hand, which opened easily to his touch. He accordingly went in, followed by his two attendants, and, closing the entrance carefully behind him, advanced up an avenue of trees which apparently led towards the chateau he was seeking.

The night, as I have said, was extremely dark, and

Ernest de Nogent for some time looked for the mansion in vain. In the end, however, he perceived the dark lines of a building at some distance on the road, and to the left, as Pierre Morin had described, some scattered groups of trees at the distance of about a hundred yards from the avenue. As soon as he had satisfied himself that this was the spot which the deputy of the lieutenant-general had meant, he quitted the road, and proceeded to shelter himself under the trees; in doing which, his horse took fright at a roe-deer which started from the bushes, and rearing violently, had nearly fallen back with him. Ernest de Nogent, however, who was a bold and practised horseman, forced the animal forward among the trees, and then dismounting, quieted and pacified him, to prevent the fretful passaging into which the struggle had thrown it.

Before this was fully accomplished, he heard the sound of other horses' feet coming up the avenue, and in a minute or two after, as he gazed intently forward, he saw distinctly three or four dark forms ride rapidly along the road. The murmur of voices, too, was heard; and just as they reached the nearest point to himself, one of the speakers raised his tone, saying, with a short, peculiar, and disagreeable laugh, "We will soon see: they have taken care of the gate, I hope."

Ernest said not a word, and his heart beat a good deal, but it was with anger, not with fear; and he gazed steadily towards the building which was before his eyes for several minutes. As the shadow was there darker, he could just faintly distinguish several horsemen pause and dismount; but a moment after, a large door in the centre of the building opened, and from the bright light which issued forth he perceived clearly that the suspicions which the tone of the voice and the peculiar laugh he had heard induced him to entertain, were not without foundation, for in the graceful though somewhat spare form that first entered the chateau he instantly recognised the person of the Baron de Cajare.

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